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DOCTOR WHO
AND THE
PIRATE PLANET

Based on the BBC television serial by Douglas Adams DAVID BISHOP

A TSV BOOK
published by
the New Zealand
Doctor Who Fan Club

A TSV Book

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Introduction

At the end of 1989, Doctor Who was coming to an end and I was preparing to emigrate halfway round the world to London. I wasn't sure how long I'd stay in Britain [I'm still there, sixteen and a half years later] or when I'd be back. One of my final jobs was completing a task I'd volunteered myself for, adapting Douglas Adams' debut Doctor Who ad-venture The Pirate Planet into prose for the NZDWFC. Nothing like having a deadline for concentrating the mind, I find.

I thrashed the text out on an old typewriter, sitting at a dining room table in my father's house. Paul Scoones kindly fixed the many errors and the results were published in 1990. Several years later Paul re-edited the text for a new edition, adding material gleaned from the original scripts. I happily agreed with this - anybody who wants to make my work look and read better is always my friend!

Fast forward to the year 2006; Doctor Who is back, a pop culture phenomenon that's bigger than ever. I have to pinch myself most days to believe that it's true, after 16 years of waiting. [Funny how the 1996 TV Movie has been all but forgotten, isn't it?] Meanwhile, the NZDWFC is keeping pace with the times as always, publishing The Pirate Planet and all the other TSV Books online. Over the years these fan-produced novelisa-tions have drawn no little praise for tackling tricky stories and doing them justice. I'm looking forward to seeing the results when they go online - hopefully you'll enjoy them as well.

In February this year, I went to the Gallifrey convention in Los Angeles. Among the guests was David Warwick, who played Kimus in The Pirate Planet. By chance we ended up chatting while waiting to be introduced to the convention on the opening night. Realising I was from New Zealand, David told me about living in Auckland for several years in the early 1980s. He had fond memories of life in Ponsonby, even though it was a much rougher and less genteel place back then than it is today. So, it seems there's more than one thing linking New Zealand with The Pirate Planet.

Enjoy the story. All the best bits are by Douglas Adams, all the good bits are by Paul Scoones and I filled in the rest!

David Bishop

Scotland, May 2006.

Editor's Note

This edition is a revised and expanded version of the novelisation by David Bishop originally published in 1990. It incorporates a significant amount of material that was

either cut from the rehearsal scripts, or recorded but excised for the transmitted television episodes.

In addition, several televised sequences omitted from the original version have been rein-serted. Thanks are due to Andrew Pixley for his time and generosity in researching the

‘missing’ sequences; also to David Bishop for approving, these alterations.

Paul Scoones

Prologue

The boy was running for his life.

His bare feet pounded muddy pathways as he desperately tried to elude his pursuer.

The boy's fragile chest heaved for air and his throat was raw, with a taste like blood assaulting his senses. Behind him the heavy breathing of his hunter grew ever closer and the terrified youngster increased his frantic pace.

The boy began to sob uncontrollably as he ran, gasping sobs racking his lungs and pulling away valuable breath. Tears streamed down his cheeks, flowing into fierce trickles of sweat. Then he fell, his limbs sprawling in muddy mire...

A smile flickered sadistically across the face of a woman watching the chase - the younger boy was caught. She considered the pursuit as an amusement, a plaything. Once all the in-habitants of this wretched world had been her playthings, for the watching woman was Xanxia, Queen of Zanak. No velvet glove had softened the blows struck by her iron-fisted monarchy of terror, crushing all spirit or hope from her subjects.

But the once mighty Queen was now merely a memory on Zanak. Her reign was already becoming a black shadow over the planet's past, the stuff of legend. Still Xanxia lived on to plot and scheme, alone in her rotting royal residence high in the mountains above Zanak's largest settlement.

The tyrant ruler turned away from the window, instantly forgetting the miniature drama being played out below. She had more important things to do - a final ploy to play in her duel with that unbeatable foe, death. Summoning the last vestiges of her failing strength, she activated a control on a wall of complex circuitry. An invisible beam was thrown up into the heavens, like a grasping talon of death.

The Queen stumbled to her throne and collapsed into its cobwebbed elegance. She closed her eyes and breathed outwards with a sound like the rattling of old bones...

The younger boy closed his eyes tightly, waiting for the inevitable blows. But the blows did not come - instead he heard a gasp from his tormentor and felt the grip on his garments slacken. The boy took his chance and was away and running before his hunter even realised. Only when the lad was well away did he look back over his shoulder at what had distracted his pursuer.

A huge silver vessel was falling from the sky, flames and smoke pouring out behind it.

The craft plunged across the dusky horizon into the mountain range overlooking the settlement. The darkness was suddenly ablaze with a light so bright the boy had to look away for a moment. Then came a great crashing like thunder booming back and forth across the plain, echoing from mountain to mountain.

Balaton clasped his hands over his ears and ran home, trying to block out this unworldly wail of death and destruction. But the echoes of this event would resound far beyond this night...

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The Pirate Captain

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die you fool, die!' she screamed and brought her hands together with a sound like thunder. 'Thousands of sensors cried out inputs of pain, systems and sinews collapsing...

Suddenly the Captain was shouting.

'Mr Fibuli. Mr Fibuli! By all the x-ray storms of Vega, where is that nincompoop?'

The Captain blinked and realised he was still alive. But what was that recurring vision and what did it mean?

While the Captain mused, a vexed voice filled the multi-sided chamber of metal and glass. 'Calling Mr Fibuli, Mr Fibuli required on the Bridge immediately.'

The Captain pushed aside thoughts of the deadly angel of darkness and let loose another bellow for effect.

'Moons of madness, why am I encumbered with incompetence?'

The subject of all this shouting entered the Bridge, striding briskly.

'Captain, sir -'

'Your report, Mr Fibuli...'

'Yes sir, I have it -'

'... Is thirty seconds late!'

'Yes, sir.'

'My qualities are many, Mr Fibuli...'

‘Oh, yes sir -’

‘... But an infinite capacity for patience is not among them.’ The Captain used his humanoid right hand to punch a button on the private console beside his command seat, the com. On his shoulder the robotic parrot Polyphase Avitron whirred into life and regarded the hapless Fibuli as its next potential prey.

The second-in-command bobbed about like an escape pod in an asteroid storm, thought the Captain - nervous and about to be struck down. He was tempted to end that wait immediately but good deputies were hard to find on this soulless rock. The Captain realised his mind was wandering and tried to focus on Fibuli’s words.

‘I apologise most abjectly, Captain, b-but I do have good news, sir.’

‘I hope you do!’

‘Well, sir, all deposits of the minerals Voolium, Galdrium and Assetenite 455 have now been now been mined, processed and stored, sir. Good quantities of aluminas, the usual, sir, carbon isotopes, etcetera, etcetera, and the residue has been processed...’

‘In the normal way!’ bellowed the Captain to cut short the prattling of his deputy.

Fibuli paused for an uncomfortable breath then continued, proffering a glossy manifest to the Captain. ‘Here is a list of the minerals, sir.’

The Captain looked over the document with his humanoid eye. Before it could even focus on the data detailed, his other eye - an infra-red robotic sensor implanted in the me-6

tallic left side of his head - had already analysed the information, correlated it and transmitted the relevant data to his computerised brain. He responded to this input by tossing the manifest aside. ‘Hah! Baubles, baubles, dross and baubles! We must find Vasilium!

We must find Madranite 1-5,’ said the Captain urgently.

‘Well, sir, we have located a new source.’

‘Excellent, excellent.’

‘That’s what caused the delay, Captain. We wanted to be absolutely certain.’ The momentary relief on Fibuli’s face faded as he voiced a concern. ‘It’s in an unexpected sector -

here, let me show you this chart...’

It was proffered and just as quickly thrown away.

‘We’ll mine it. Make immediate preparations.’

‘Well, there is something rather curious, Captain,’ ventured the first officer. ‘Here is a detailed description of the sector -’

‘I said we’ll mine it, Mr Fibuli.’

‘But sir -’

‘Make immediate preparations. Now! Or I’ll have your bones bleached.’ The Captain’s logic circuits regained control of his fiery temper and lowered the volume of his vocal output. ‘Is that clear?’

‘Aye, aye, Captain. Thank you, sir.’ Fibuli saluted ineffectually and turned to consult with the other technicians on the Bridge about the impending manoeuvre.

The Captain watched him for a moment then regarded his robotic parrot. ‘Who’s a pretty Polyphase Avitron, then?’ he murmured softly to his mechanical pet. After a pause, the Captain swiveled the com round to his private console. From here he could speak to all within the huge structure of the Bridge and also to the citizens of the planet’s major settlements.

The largest settlement lay in the valley below the Bridge’s mountaintop perch, a jumble of low stone buildings clustered on a wide alluvial plain. Citizens gathered in courtyards to hear the latest proclamation from their unseen leader as the one-way communications system crackled into life.

‘Hear this. Now hear this. This is your Captain speaking.’ After these few stock phrases to announce his speech, the Captain began in earnest. ‘Citizens prepare yourselves.

Watch for the Omens. I declare a new golden age of prosperity for all. I say again, I declare the dawning of a new golden age of prosperity - watch for the Omens.’

Most of the affluent and well-dressed citizens cheered these words. But in one courtyard stood a young man whose face had a pallor of death about it. He seemed frightened by the announcement greeted so eagerly by the others.

‘Under the benevolent leadership of your Captain, a period of unparalleled wealth and affluence will begin. The mines will once again be full of riches,’ continued the Captain.

‘Richer jewels, finer clothes, food in great abundance. Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice will be yours! Watch for the Omens!’

The message ended leaving most citizens a buzz with excitement. They did not notice the young man stumbling away, head in hands. Already he could feel the first jabbing pains, the incredible constriction. He had to get home.

The young man's pain was unnoticed by those in the courtyard, but others were watching elsewhere. In a secret underground chamber, a circle of shrouded figures clothed in simple yellow robes stood silently. All in the darkened group concentrated towards the centre of the gathering. There the air was alive with a power like lightening of the mind.

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One amongst them pulled back his shroud to reveal a pallid face with shrunken eyes.

He looked around the circle and spoke, but his lips did not move, for his words were thoughts.

‘Watch!’

In the circle's centre the air shimmered and swirled into a vortex of colour and light.

Within this maelstrom formed a vision globe made from mental energies. The image of the troubled young man in the courtyard appeared within the globe. The leader looked around the circle again and spoke through his mind.

‘Are we agreed?’

A mental murmur of assent was the reply.

‘We have found another. The darkness is growing, the time of evil has once more come. We must prepare.’

The others echoed his thought. They began mustering their might for the ordeal ahead.

Time and Space were colliding.

The two dimensions fought for control in a domain of darkness, where the sparks of their battle threw fragments of light outwards like shards of broken glass. The clash was as eternal and infinite as the combatants. The fighting place was the Vortex. Like some cos-mic melting pot it could hold anything, bend it, age it or suspend it in a moment for eons.

If any entity ever gained control of this majestic whirlpool of wonders, the powers gained could create salvation or cataclysm forever. Once before - before history or memory or meaning - this had happened. It was a salvation and cataclysm and everything be-twixt them, the beginning and an end.

Good and evil, black and white were created then, and guardians created to balance the duality of the cosmos. And there was a key.

It unlocked the secrets of time and space, power unimaginable to all, mortal or eternal.

But the key was too dangerous to ever be whole so it was splintered into six exactly unlike segments and these were scattered across forever. There they stayed hidden, only to be re-constituted when light or darkness threatened to engulf each other again.

Now was such an occasion.

A tall, blue box was suspended in the Vortex, looking for all the eons like a police tele-phone box from a curious little world called Earth. But appearances are deceiving for within was bigger than without, the craft being able to transcend dimensions internally.

This quite remarkable ship could sail over time and space, though with an erratic nature matching the quirks of its keeper.

The tall, roguish box was called the TARDIS, and its tall, roguish keeper was called the Doctor. The strange being was inside his craft and held in his hands a segment of the most powerful key in the cosmos.

He was trying unsuccessfully to stuff it into a boot.

The mobile computer called K9 (because of its dog-like appearance), observed the Doctor's struggle. Frustrated but now bowed, the man in the baggy tweed trousers, huge white shirt and brown knee-length greatcoat tried to inject some levity into the situation.

'There you are K9, the first segment of the Key to Time. Job well done.'

'Correction, master. A job well done to the extent of 0.167666...'

'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.' Levity recognition was not really part of K9's programming.

The Doctor abandoned his struggle for a moment to give the crystalline segment a polish with a yellow dust cloth. 'The others will be easy - piece of cake.'

'Piece of cake, master?' Puns also eluded K9's programming.

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'Hmm!'

The Doctor finally managed to jam the segment into the black boot. Now - where to store it?

‘Piece of cake,’ burbled K9. ‘Radial segment of baked confection. Coefficient of relevance to the Key to Time: zero.’

While the computerised companion was occupied with this irrelevancy, the Doctor had spotted the perfect place to conceal this segment from the most powerful key in the cosmos - an old fridge.

Actually the big white metal box had been an old fridge when it caught the eye of one of the Time Lord’s earlier incarnation in a junkyard one day. It took a couple of regenerations and the help of an intelligent young Earthling called Liz Shaw to transform the cold storage unit into an incredibly sophisticated safe that would outwit even the fifty-five fingered safe-crackers of the planet Securitاس.

The former fridge still looked like a fridge but as the Doctor grasped its door handle his palm print and body chemistry was analysed and identified in the time it took him to kick the object’s side with a leather-booted foot. Satisfied of his identity, the fridge finally allowed access and the Doctor tossed the boot containing the segment to the rear of the cabinet before slamming the door shut.

The Doctor remembered K9’s last statement and made a last cryptic comment as they left the storage room.

‘That’s what I said, K9 - piece of cake!’

Romanadvoratrelundar (Romana to her enemies and Fred when she was being silly - which was not often), could not sleep.

The youthful Time Lady had only recently become a passenger on the TARDIS, after being appointed to assist the Doctor find and assemble the Key to Time. The pairing was proving explosive - where the Doctor preferred to follow gut feelings and instinct, Romanadvoratrelundar had excelled at reason, caution and quiet calculation during her training at the Time Lord academy. Never the twain should meet but the two opposites had been forced together by the White Guardian for this all-important quest across time and space.

A cold war of attrition had broken out on the TARDIS and a particular point of conflict was the ship’s automatic lighting system. Although the Doctor often uttered epigrams like ‘Sleep is for tortoises’, he had programmed the lighting to follow the night and day light cycle of the planet Earth.

He claimed he had grown accustomed to this pattern while exiled to that world by the Time Lords, but his new assistant thought he persisted with the diurnal lighting simply to annoy her. It was badly at odds with the resting patterns she had developed over more than a hundred years while growing up on the Time Lords’ native world of Gallifrey.

So once again Romanadvoratrelundar found herself wide-awake in the dimness of another artificial dawn in the TARDIS. Grumbling to herself, she rose from her rest bench and refreshed herself in the cleansing room adjoining her quarters.

The tall, classically beautiful woman clothed herself with tasteful care. Over white slacks and blouse she added a short-sleeved pink silk shirt belted discreetly at the waist and white calf-length leather boots. Two pink clips held her brown, shoulder-length hair back from her heart-shaped face.

After a light snack from the TARDIS food machine, Romanadvoratrelundar decided on a little light reading. Illumination had now reached daytime levels, and making her way towards the central control room, she found a well-laden bookshelf sitting incongruously 9

in one of the corridors. On top of the stacks sat a heavy leather-bound volume with gold-edged pages - the TARDIS manual. She picked up the weighty tome and continued her journey.

Romanadvoratrelundar was absorbed in reading the manual in the multi-sided central control room when the Doctor entered. She had perched the volume on a gaudy, golden reading stand shaped like a large eagle and was just finishing a section on dematerialisation procedures. The Time Lord was clutching the dust cloth and began to give the mushroom-like console unit an imperfect polish.

‘Good morning, Romana, that looks interesting - what are you reading?’

‘Good morning, Doctor,’ she replied, gritting her teeth at his persistence in using the abbreviated version of her name she hated so much. ‘I’m just familiarising myself with the technical details of this capsule.’

‘Capsule?! What kind of a word is that? If you mean TARDIS, why don’t you say

‘TARDIS’?’

‘The Type Forty capsule wasn’t on the main syllabus, you see.’

‘Yes, well, I don’t know what the Academy’s coming to these days,’ the Doctor mumbled to himself.

‘Veteran and vintage vehicles was an optional extra. I preferred something more interesting - the life-cycle of the Gallifreyan flutterwing.’

‘Now you’re being frivolous,’ scolded the Doctor mildly.

‘I wouldn’t dream of it,’ smiled Romana.

The Doctor peered at the manual and frowned. ‘Where did you get that tome, anyway?’

‘From its storage cabinet, of course. Didn’t you recognise it?’

‘No.’ the Doctor replied. ‘Should I?’

‘It’s the technical operations manual for this... TARDIS.’

‘Oh, I shouldn’t pay any attention to that, if I were you,’ the Doctor advised her, turning his attention back to the console. ‘Oh no!’

Romana looked up sharply ‘What?’

‘How paralytically dull, boring and tedious!’ the Doctor exclaimed.

Romana noticed that he had inserted the Tracer into the TARDIS console. This wand-like device was used to locate and transmute segments of the Key to Time. When inserted into the console the Tracer linked with the ship’s circuits to pinpoint the nearest segment’s planetary position.

‘Our next destination?’ asked Romana cheerfully, approaching the Doctor. For her, anywhere was exciting after Gallifrey, even the wintry world of Ribos where they had just been to get the first segment.

‘Yes, Calufrax,’ announced the Doctor flatly, his usually lively face and wild eyes showing no hint of enthusiasm.

‘Calufrax?’

‘Yes, mean little planet. Still, listen - why don’t you watch while I set the coordinates on this vintage veteran of mine. Maybe you’ll learn something.’

‘Right!’ replied Romana, thinking the Doctor was at last beginning to take her seriously. The towering Time Lord began expertly manipulating the controls of his ship to effect a materialisation. His companion watched, frowned and finally decided to risk a comment. ‘Ahh, Doctor?’

‘Mmm?’

‘What about the synchronic feedback checking circuit?’

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‘What about it?’

‘Aren’t you going to set it?’

‘No, no, no, I never bother about that - complete waste of time.’

‘Oh, according to the manual, it’s essential,’ countered Romana, always one for doing things by the book. By now the Doctor was sufficiently annoyed to fix her with a steely gaze.

‘Listen - do you have any idea how long I’ve been operating this TARDIS?’

‘523 years.’

‘Right!’ Suddenly the significance of the passing centuries caught the Doctor, like a brick with a slice of lemon wrapped around it, right between the eyes. ‘Is it really that long? My, how time flies.’

‘A common delusion among the middle aged,’ Romana observed. ‘It’s known nowadays as the Mandrian Syndrome. According to Professor Halcron...’

‘Professor Halcron? Never heard of him.’

‘He happened to be the leading authority in the universe on hyper-psychological atavisms.’

‘Can he fly a TARDIS?’

‘I hardly think that’s relevant.’

‘Well, I can. And just between ourselves, let me tell you I’m really rather good at it.’

The Doctor asserted, and resumed setting the controls.

‘And the multi-loop stabiliser?’ Romana suggested, a moment later.

‘The what?’

‘Multi-loop stabiliser.’ She strode over to the manual and began to quote directly from it to give her argument an extra ring of authority. ‘It says here “On any capsule it will be found impossible to effect a smooth materialisation without first activating the multi-loop stabiliser.”’

At this point, the Doctor decided to check the manual for himself. He peered over Romana’s shoulder at the relevant passages. ‘Absolute rubbish,’ he said eventually, tearing the page from the manual, screwing it up and tossing it aside. ‘Now - I’ll show you a really smooth materialisation with-out a multi-loop anything - watch this!’ The Doctor went back to the console and applied his long, bony fingers to the controls. ‘Calufrax - here we come!’

Immediately the TARDIS began to shudder and shake, as if about to tear itself apart.

Romana grabbed the console for support. ‘What’s happening?’

‘She won’t materialise!’ was the worried reply.

Romana would have smiled in triumph at that moment, but a particularly violent shudder sent her flying across the control room.

‘Danger, master, danger,’ advised K9.

‘Of course, K9, of course,’ the Doctor replied tersely.

The TARDIS abruptly stopped lurching, causing the Doctor to knock his face against the console. He straightened up, clutching at his face.

‘Something wrong?’ asked Romana.

‘No, no, no, no,’ the Doctor mumbled, nursing a small cut to his upper lip. ‘No, nothing at all.’

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Arrival on Zanak

The Captain looked about the Bridge and bellowed.

‘Imbeciles! Fools! Thrice worse than incompetent idiots!’

The air was acrid with the stench of burning circuitry as smoke billowed from the towering consoles and readout units that were the Bridge’s outer walls. Technicians ran about desperately trying to damp down the worst damage until the automatic repair systems took over. The Captain stood in the centre of the chamber watching their efforts. Pathetic, he thought to himself.

...The angel...

The Captain shook himself to vanquish the vision before it could engulf his consciousness again and shouted, ‘What pernicious injury have you inflicted on my precious engines? Mr Fibuli?’

The first lieutenant flinched at his name and then stepped to his leader’s side.

‘Captain?’

‘Are you trying to scuttle this planet?’ demanded the Captain.

‘No, sir! I’ve run a quick inspection, sir, and the actual damage isn’t as bad as we feared.’

‘And what did you fear?’

‘I assure you sir the problem is very slight indeed. Just a few minor circuits shorted out, a few components need to be replaced, there’s nothing we can’t soon...’

The Captain hated his deputy for adopting this fawning pose. An abrupt, direct question usually put a dent in the drivelt. ‘Do not trifle with me, Mr Fibuli - what happened?’

‘Well, as far as we can tell, sir, some freak local disturbance, probably electromagnetic.’

From fawning to falsehoods, thought the Captain. ‘What?’

‘It passed very quickly,’ said Fibuli with a weak smile.

‘Idle prattlings, Mr Fibuli! A caveman with his first rock could tell you that was no mere electromagnetic disturbance. I will know the truth.’ The Captain strode to the com and sat facing his private console. He punched up a series of readouts on the monitors by interfacing his left, android arm with the central computer. ‘Warp oscilloscope readings -

there, Mr Fibuli, there’s your local electromagnetic disturbance,’ he said disdainfully.

‘What do you make of those readings?’

‘That’s extraordinary.’

‘See, for ten seconds, the entire fabric of the space-time continuum was ripped apart.’

The half-man, half-robot displayed some more data on the screens by a surge of will through his synapses. ‘Panaccetration readings, critical overload, every system jammed solid.’ More information flashed across the console. ‘Gravity dilation readings... There, Mr Fibuli, can you explain those figures?’

His deputy swallowed heavily. Not off the top of my head, sir.’

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‘No? And why not?! Because for ten seconds, the whole infra-structure of quantum physics was in retreat! I tell you Mr Fibuli, in all the years I have navigated the uncharted currents of the ether I have never encountered the like of this. Find out

what happened, Mr Fibuli - and find out fast. Or by all the fires of night, I'll have that skull off you!'

As the deputy scurried away, the Captain eased himself back in the com and continued analysing incoming data about the latest planet fall.

Not for the first time in the TARDIS, Romana and the Doctor were arguing.

'Not so! I'm perfectly capable of admitting when I'm wrong,' protested the older Time Lord.

'Oh?' uttered Romana, arching one of her perfectly formed eyebrows.

'Yes! Only this time I wasn't,' continued the Doctor. 'There's definitely something out there jamming our materialisation field.'

'Oh that's what it was,' came the mocking reply.

'Yes! Yes, that's what it was, yes. Whatever it was, it wasn't a multi-loop whatsit or anything else to do with that manual,' said the Time Lord, waving a dismissive finger at the offending volume.

'No, of course not,' said Romana, as if humoring a petulant child. 'May I try?'

'What - by the book?'

Romana nodded.

'Yes, all right' the Doctor conceded. 'You do it your way.'

Romana stepped forward to the controls, eager for the chance to prove herself.

'But there's still something out there jamming our materialisation field,' chipped in the Doctor unhelpfully.

Grin and ignore it, Romana told herself, 'Right - synchronic feedback.'

'Won't make a scrap of difference.'

'We'll see - multi-loop stabiliser.'

In anticipation of the alleged catastrophe to come, the Doctor threw himself on the floor beside his robot companion. 'Look out, K9 - hold on!'

'Now!' announced Romana, activating the remat circuits. The TARDIS made a smooth, textbook landing. Romana turned to the crouching Doctor. 'Well?'

He removed his hands from his ears and stood up, looking absolutely amazed to still be enjoying his fourth incarnation. 'Good!'

‘Thank you, Doctor.’

‘No, no, that was very, very good. Wasn’t it good, K9?’

‘Very, very, very good, master,’ chipped in the mobile computer.

‘Oh, terribly good,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘Listen, I think she’s going to be all right. Very all right.’

‘Very, very all right,’ K9 concurred.

The Doctor turned his attention to the TARDIS console, gently patting its surface.

‘See, it wasn’t that bad was it?’ he reassured the ship. ‘Silly old thing, making all that ridiculous fuss.’ He cuffed the edge of the console. ‘Of course, it was pretty easy really, now that that jamming field has been turned off, don’t you think? Of course it would be churlish to say so though, wouldn’t it? Yes, spoil her fun; not good.’ The Doctor turned to Romana.

‘Just a little pat on the back from time to time,’ he advised, tactfully gesturing at the console.

The smile on Romana’s face had gone decidedly sour. She activated the scanner.

‘Shall we have a look at Calufrax now?’

The Doctor ignored the screen, and squatted down beside the robot dog. ‘K9?’

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‘Master?’

‘You don’t think I’m getting middle-aged do you?’ the Doctor asked anxiously.

K9 suddenly seemed to get upset. His head and tail rose and he gave a low mechanical growl. After a moment he subsided once more.

The Doctor looked taken aback. ‘Well, there’s no need to be like that about it.’

Romana’s attention was completely fixed on the scanner screen. ‘Doctor?’

‘Yes?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Come and have a look at Calufrax.’

He stood up and went to a hat and coat stand in a corner of the control room and began donning an incredibly long, multi-coloured woollen scarf. ‘Oh, all right then, let’s

get it over with. Horrible place, Calufrax, cold wet, icy - no life of any sort - boring. Ignorant students; think they know it all,' he muttered pointedly.

Romana was puzzled to find a view on the scanner very different to the Doctor's description. She could see what appeared to be part of an urban settlement with a courtyard in the foreground. The white stone walls were dotted with archways and many pathways ran off the meeting area. Several humanoids in affluent, relaxed garb were strolling across the courtyard. 'What's the matter? I got you to Calufrax didn't I? It looks very pleasant to me,' commented Romana.

Slapping on a battered felt hat, the Doctor took his first glance at the scanner image.

'What? Calufrax?' he exclaimed after a moment. 'Don't make me laugh, this isn't anything like Calufrax. You've made an enormous mistake. 'You've probably missed it by a couple of million light years! Two out of ten for effort.'

Without warning, K9 started spinning in a tight circle, very fast. The Doctor stared. 'I wonder what's biting him?' As abruptly as he had started, K9 stopped spinning.

Romana looked from the Doctor to the scanner and back again, not sure which to believe. The Time Lord was examining spatial readouts on the central console. 'But what mistake can I possibly have made, Doctor?'

'That's what I'm trying to find out. Now, our present co-ordinates are...' The Doctor pressed a series of buttons on the console and compared two sets of readings. He frowned.

'That's strange - can't be right. It is right - but it can't be, can it?' the Doctor wondered out loud.

'Have you decided where we are, Doctor?'

'Well according to these space time coordinates, we have arrived at precisely the right point in space at precisely the right time -'

Romana beamed triumphant. 'Yes, I know.'

'- But on the wrong planet,' concluded the Doctor.

'What?' exclaimed his companion, the smugness draining from her face.

'This isn't Calufrax,' the Doctor observed.

'Then where are we?'

'I haven't got the faintest idea,' the Doctor confessed. 'All I do know is that this planet wasn't here when I tried to land...' His perplexed expression gave way to one of adventurous enthusiasm. 'Shall we see what it's doing here?' he suggested.

Kimus strode purposefully through the settlement. He had heard the Captain's pronounce-ment and immediately set out for the home of his best friend, Pralix. Kimus used to welcome each new golden age of prosperity like the other citizens but now, as he matured, questions filled the young man's mind. Where did all this wealth come from? Was there not some terrible price to pay for all this good fortune?

Lately he had been becoming increasingly critical about the Captain's regime, a dan-
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gerous stance on Zanak. Others who had spoken out disappeared but Kimus was determined to get some answers. He knew the planet's legends, and he knew things had not always been as they were now. Sure, there had been poverty and hardship, but there was also freedom to think, to act and to dream.

His resolve was hardened by the tragic death of his father when Kimus was just a boy.

The family had links to Zanak's old royal dynasty, but that had all been wiped away by the Captain. Still the leadership qualities were apparent in Kimus, and he always felt he was destined for greatness.

The young man nodded his noble face at a passing citizen as he walked, but the other man turned away. Kimus' stance made him a dangerous person to be seen with, and the older citizens especially branded him as an outcast. But amongst the younger people he was popular for his daring and visionary views.

Despite all this, Kimus felt an impotent rage growing within him, like a paralysed force waiting to be unleashed. At times he could almost feel the energy at the ends of his fingertips, waiting for release. Soon, he thought, soon I shall find what I seek. But for now he pushed these thoughts aside and concentrated on getting to where Pralix lived. He had to see if the terrible pains that seemed to come worse with every new golden age again af-flicted his young friend.

Kimus quickened his steps.

The shrouded figures stumbled about in a circle, their faces masks of pain, bodies bowed and beaten. Voices cried out in unison, filling the stone chamber.

'Life force dying. Life force dying! Life force dying!'

The pain was echoed in another room, another place, on the face of the youth who had earlier stumbled away from the courtyard. Now his face was pallid and constricted, his dark hair falling lank with sweat onto the pillow beneath his head. His consciousness swirled back and forth as he cried out in agony. The slim wiry youth began thrashing about on his bed, until the arms of his sibling, Mula, restrained him.

Her warm face was filled with concern as she looked down at her brother. Honey-brown hair framed her friendly features, and its colour matched the autumnal shades of her garb. She pressed a damp cloth to the youth's face, her movements graceful and precise.

'Calm yourself, Pralix, you must calm yourself,' said a distraught voice. Balaton bobbed about behind Mula like the fussy old man he was. The young woman turned to him helplessly.

'He's much worse than last time, Grandfather.' She looked back at her brother. 'Pralix - can't you hear us? Tell us what's wrong.'

Balaton already knew the answer to that, and it gripped his heart like a fist of ice. He fervently hoped against hope that he was wrong, but the cold grasp of certainty felt chillier every moment. Instincts born of a long life prompted his next words.

'It's a mistake to ask too many questions.'

The young woman turned on him accusingly. 'That's your answer to everything, isn't it?' She walked out of the rest chamber disgustedly, striding angrily into the main room of the dwelling.

'I have no need for answers - all I ask is for a quiet life,' Balaton called after her. Before the acrimonious words could erupt into another bitter argument, he was pulled back to the bedside by his grandson's cries. 'Pralix, you must calm yourself,' the old man pleaded with the feverish youth. He went out into the main room to voice his fears to Mula.

'People will hear. I'm sure people will hear.'

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Balaton could remember this scene well, could remember the lad's father stricken in exactly the same way, so many times before. He had hoped this curse had passed from the family, but now it had returned...Mula snapped him back to the present with the harsh tone of her voice.

'Grandfather! Pralix is very ill, and all you can think about is what will happen if the neighbours hear!'

'You know very well what will happen.'

'Why?' asked the young woman despairingly. 'Why, why, why, why?'

‘Oh Mula, don’t spoil everything by asking so many questions. I think I’m going to lose one grandchild already; please don’t let it be both of you,’ replied the grey-haired man, his face full of fear. ‘Just settle down and enjoy what life gives you so freely.’

At this moment, Pralix cried out again, and both his relatives turned towards the rest chamber. Suddenly the sound of boots marching toward the dwelling was audible and the pair looked at each other. Could this be the moment they both feared so much?

‘Listen,’ said Mula urgently. ‘Someone’s coming!’

‘Quickly - the curtains,’ hissed Balaton. Mula dived for the rest chamber, pulling the translucent curtain across its arched doorway. Her grandfather lowered himself onto a black padded bench in the main room, trying in vain to look relaxed and casual. He was facing away from the dwelling’s entranceway and held his breath as its bead curtain was flung noisily aside. Balaton closed his eyes, fearing the worst...

‘Balaton?’ asked a puzzled voice.

The old man let out an involuntary sigh of relief and turned to face the visitor. Mula emerged from the rest chamber and raced across the main room towards the hesitant new arrival, embracing him warmly.

‘Kimus - thank goodness it’s only you!’ she said gratefully.

‘Only me?’ he replied with mock indignation. ‘Have you heard the news? Hello, old man,’ he greeted Balaton.

‘Respect, Kimus. Show some respect for age,’ Balaton chastised the young man.

Kimus ignore the rebuke. ‘It seems we’re all going to be rich - again. A new Golden Age of Prosperity - again. Omens in the sky, the works. Everyone’s out celebrating, trying to look as though it’s the greatest thing that ever happened - and we haven’t even cleared up from the last one, yet!’ he exclaimed.

‘Kimus! Quietly, please. The neighbours...’ cautioned Balaton nervously.

‘It’s not news to us, Kimus,’ replied Mula sadly.

‘You saw the omens?’

‘We don’t need omens.’

Kimus was very conscious of the young woman’s tension. ‘Pralix?’ he asked.

‘He’s gone stark mad,’ Mula informed him. ‘Again.’

‘What’s wrong with him?’

‘We thought that...’ said Mula, her voice trailing off as she glanced back at the rest chamber.

‘What?’ insisted Kimus.

‘Never mind.’

Pralix cried out again, and his best friend rushed into the rest chamber, followed by Mula and Balaton.

‘Life force dying, life force dying, life force dying!’ shouted Pralix hoarsely.

The Doctor emerged from the TARDIS ready for the worst weather Calufrax could throw at him, his scarf wrapped tightly across his face and hat brim pulled down. But the icy 16

gusts were not present - instead the weather was quite pleasant, if a touch cool.

Romana followed him out and smiled smugly. ‘Uninhabited? Ice-coated planet?’ She pulled the Tracer from her belt and activated it. The transparent device began crackling happily. ‘Well, we’ve certainly come to the right place - the signal’s coming from every-where.’

The Doctor unwrapped himself enough to look around. He grabbed the Tracer and waved it about, getting a constant signal, even when he held it up to his left ear. ‘Never trust gimmicky gadgets,’ he muttered dismissively, handing it back to Romana.

K9 trundled out through the TARDIS double doors and immediately registered an unknown presence. ‘Sentient life-form approaching.’

‘What?’ said Romana, startled by K9’s sudden announcement.

The Doctor put a friendly arm around her shoulders, which she quickly shook off. ‘It’s all right,’ he said, ‘it just means somebody’s coming.’

‘I know what it means!’ protested Romana. She saw two people approaching and went over to accost them. ‘Excuse me -’

‘No, no, excuse me, I’ll do it, he replied, elbowing her in the ribs. ‘Excuse me, would you take me to your leader? What we would like to know, you see, is what planet... what...

Ah...’ He stammered to a stop as the pair walked by, completely ignoring him. A similar thing happened when he tried to accost another person walking in the opposite direction a moment later. ‘Halt! What we...’ The despondent Doctor went over to his robot companion. ‘We’re not doing very well, K9, no...’

‘Suggestion, master. Suggest you allow mistress to make contact.’

‘Nonsense! Making contact with an alien race is an immensely skilled and delicate operation. It calls for tact and experience. What would she know about it?’

‘She is prettier than you, master.’

‘Is she?’ The thought had never occurred to him and was a curious value judgment to come from K9. Obviously the computer’s programming needed a really good overhaul.

‘What’s that got to do with it?’ The Time Lord turned and saw it had quite a lot to do with it.

Enak had been making his way through the settlement to the main courtyard for the Feast of Omens when he was approached by a rather good looking woman in striking pink and white garb. The inconspicuous citizen soon found himself warming to her questions.

‘It’s a new golden age, you see, a golden age of prosperity,’ he explained. ‘I must say I still get very excited about it all. I know we have them rather often now - but that’s because of the Captain’s great goodness, you see.’

‘Excuse me...’ the Doctor interrupted.

‘Just a minute,’ interjected Romana. ‘The Captain?’

The Doctor shook his head and wandered back over to K9, ignored by both Romana and Enak.

‘Oh yes, it’s the Captain who does it all for us,’ Enak enthused. ‘And it really was spectacular this time. The Omens! The skies shook with lightning! We are going to be very rich. Very, very rich.’

‘What - just like that? Because of lights in the sky?’

‘Oh yes! That’s the way it always happens.’ The slightly plump citizen dug into a pouch on his belt and pulled out some coloured stones. ‘Here - have some diamonds - and yes, I’ve got a ruby - suit a pretty girl like you.’

‘Oh, thank you very much,’ said Romana, taking the gems.

To Romana’s frustration, the Doctor chose this moment to try and enter the conversation again. ‘Excuse me...’ he began.

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Romana quickly cut him off by pulling a white paper bag from her pocket and holding it under Enak’s nose. ‘Would you like some jelly babies?’

‘Oh - thank -’ he stammered, and managed to pick one out before the wild-eyed, curly-haired Doctor grabbed a handful. ‘What are they?’

‘Sweets. You eat them,’ replied the Doctor, jamming several in his mouth and chewing hungrily.

‘Oh! Thank you,’ uttered Enak, picking out an assortment of differing colours from the bag. He decided he had tarried too long with this strange pair who asked too many questions and volunteered little themselves. ‘Well - I’ll be late for the feasts. Nice to meet you.’ He began striding off, and called back as an afterthought before disappearing from view, ‘Watch out for the Mentiads!’

‘The who?’ Romana called after the retreating figure.

‘Ah, excuse me. What I’d like to know is...’ the Doctor began, following after Enak, but halted and returned to Romana when it was clear that Enak wouldn’t stop for him.

The Doctor snatched the jelly babies bag from her and found its contents very much diminished. ‘Where did you get those jelly babies?’ he asked accusingly.

‘Same place you get them.’

‘Where?’

‘Your pocket,’ was the cool reply.

‘Look - good looks are no substitute for a sound character - hmm? Did he say anything about omens?’

‘Yes, omens in the sky,’ nodded Romana, and they both looked skywards.

‘Really?’ The Doctor removed an old brass telescope from his pocket and peered though it up at the sky. The blue vista held a few puffy white clouds but no clues to the cryptic omens. ‘I don’t see anything unusual - just ordinary sky. Omens, omens, I wonder...’ he muttered.

‘May I look?’ asked Romana. The Doctor passed her the telescope and she handed him the precious stones she’d been given.

While Romana peered through the telescope the Doctor cast an appreciative eye over the gemstones. ‘I think that these stones are genuine.’ He walked over to K9 and held the items over his snout. ‘What do you think, K9?’

‘Affirmative, master,’ the mobile computer replied after a cursory analysis. ‘The clear ones are the diamonds and the red ones are the rubies.’

‘Thank you very much! And what colour are the amethysts?’ chuckled the Doctor, chiding the computer’s literalness.

‘Purple, master.’

‘Affirm - a - tive...’ the Doctor’s voice trailed off as he spotted a scattering of more gemstones in a dark corner of the courtyard. He went over and crouched to have

a closer look at them. 'Extraordinary! The place is littered with them. Diamonds, Andromedan bloodstones, gravel, more diamonds.' He paused from sifting through the jewels to look up at Romana. 'Don't they have street sweepers here?'

'Well, perhaps these stones aren't valuable here, Doctor.'

'These? They're valuable anywhere. Diamond, one of the hardest substances in the Universe. Rubies, still needed to make any halfway decent laser beam. Have you seen the ones they're making now with plastic crystals? Horrid shoddy things. I wouldn't shoot my worst enemy with one.' The Doctor held some of the stones up to the light and examined them appreciatively. 'Apart from which they're terribly pretty - don't you think so?'

'Perhaps they occur naturally here, in large numbers,' Romana suggested.

'Don't they teach you youngsters any astrogeology these days? The precise combina-

tion of minerals, pressures and heat needed to make these stones has to be very rare just on the Law of Averages. You've heard of the Law of Averages?'

'Yes Doctor.'

'You can break any law you like and if you're clever you can get away with it, but if you break the Law of Averages then sooner or later someone will smell a rat. For instance...'

Romana spotted another cluster of gems nearby. She picked up a particularly large, rock-encrusted green stone from amongst the others. 'What's this?'

'Oolion, mistress,' stated K9.

'Oolion?' she echoed.

'Oolion!' said a surprised Doctor.

'Affirmative,' K9 confirmed.

'Oolion. Now that is rare. That's one of the most precious stones in the galaxy. It only occurs naturally in two places I know of - Qualactin and Bandraginus V.' The Doctor's eyes widened further, if that were possible. 'Bandraginus V! Where have I heard that mentioned recently?'

Romana was still examining the green gem. 'It's beautiful.'

'Hold it up to the light,' the Doctor suggested. 'See the green flames blazing in its heart?'

She did, and let out a gasp of delight as the gemstone came alive, green light bouncing around inside it.

‘People have murdered for that beauty - ravaged empires for it,’ the Doctor said darkly. He looked at the courtyard surface. ‘And lying in the streets, exactly where I wasn’t expecting to find it.’ The Time Lord turned back to his companion. ‘I wonder where Calufrax got to?’

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3

The Mentiads

In the underground chamber, the shrouded figures were again standing in a circle, facing inwards. In the vision globe an astral image of the Doctor formed. The leader looked to the others.

‘We have an intruder – and wait!’ The globe shimmered, and an image of Romana appeared. ‘There is another. We must act.’ The astral image slowly dissipated. ‘Act at once.’

The vigil of evil is accomplished. The one called Pralix must be harvested. The time of knowing shall be soon and fast upon that shall follow the time of vengeance - vengeance for the crimes of Zanak!’

‘Vengeance for the crimes of Zanak!’ the others echoed through their thoughts. They began to file from the chamber and begin the long trek under the mountains and across rolling hillsides towards the planet’s main settlement.

Balaton and Mula were trying to make sense of Pralix’s illness.

‘Poor Pralix,’ said the young woman. ‘Why? What does it all mean?’

‘Why should it mean anything; it’s just the way life is - accept it,’ replied her gloomy grandfather.

Balaton’s comments incensed Kimus. Like all citizens of Zanak, he respected Balaton for his age and the wisdom it was meant to carry, but the young man despised his do-nothing, survival-at-all-costs philosophies. Kimus whirled round and verbally attacked Balaton. ‘Oh yes, we can have anything we want - except the freedom to think for ourselves.’

I like to know what I’m accepting, old man.’

‘You young people nowadays, you’re all spoilt, that’s your trouble. Everything comes too easily for you,’ grumbled Balaton.

‘For all of us,’ Kimus retorted. ‘That’s just it, isn’t it? We can have anything we want - apart from the freedom to think for ourselves. To look for answers.’

‘Who ever dressed himself in answers, eh? Or filled his stomach with them?’ Balaton approached his accuser. ‘I remember when I was a lad, now things were very different then. You think you have no freedom now; you ought to have been here under old Queen Xanxia.’

A cry of pain from Pralix stopped another row starting, and Mula stepped between the two men to separate them. ‘Shh, both of you. Think of poor Pralix, he must have quietness.’

‘Quietness?’ scoffed Kimus. ‘Come on, Mula, my love. You know as well I do that no amount of quietness can save him.’

Balaton walked away into the main room, not really looking at the wild yellow and green jungle mural which cascaded across its walls. I feel old, he thought. I have lived so long and still I have no peace, no quiet. He held up a wrinkled, bony hand to his face and found it shaking uncontrollably.

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Kimus stormed after the old man, unaware of Balaton’s despair.

‘We’ve all been quiet for too long - and for what?’ he demanded and grabbed the luxurious cloth of the old man’s robing. ‘Pretty clothes? Pockets full of useless trinkets?’ Kimus went back to Mula, imploring, ‘That isn’t what life ought to be about.’

Now Balaton threw off his musings and turned on the younger man. ‘Kimus, you are a dangerous fool! Don’t listen to him, Mula. If you love your brother you must shelter him, hide him, protect him from the Mentiads. Remember what happened to your father.’ The elderly citizen bit his tongue immediately after mentioning this, but it was too late.

‘My father didn’t fall into the hands of the Mentiads - he was shot by the Captain’s guards!’ exclaimed Mula.

‘To save him from the Mentiads,’ insisted Balaton. ‘At least he died a clean death. It was an act of mercy by the Captain.’

‘Oh well, thank you, oh merciful Captain for so kindly having Mula’s father shot down in the street like a dog,’ retorted Kimus. He was enraged that Balaton could bring that up and try to twist it for his own purposes.

Kimus had been just a child when his father and Mula and Pralix's father were both stricken with the Omens illness. The Mentiads had entered the settlement and tried to take the pair away - both men were executed in front of their families by the Captain's guards before the Mentiads could get to them. Mula was too young at the time to have any recollection of the tragedy, but she had been told about it. Kimus was not so fortunate - images from that terrible day still haunted him, giving him the courage in his quest for freedom.

Balaton approached the young man, with a wild look in his eyes. 'Listen, Kimus, let me tell you this - I would cheerfully strangle Pralix with my own hands to save him from those - those...' the old man collapsed onto a padded bench, his whole body shaking.

Kimus just stared down at Balaton, aghast at this murderous confession. He looked up at Mula and saw the shame in her eyes. This evil regime is tainting even the innocent, thought Kimus hollowly.

Monsadi was ambitious, impatient and bored. The second class guard was on patrol in the settlement, an assignment he considered well below his abilities. Watching over the witless citizens of Zanak gave him little job satisfaction, so when he saw one walking smugly through a courtyard close by, he decided to have some sport with him.

Enak almost jumped into the air when suddenly accosted by the curt guard. Instinctively he tried to conceal the handful of sweets he had received from the strangers.

'Where did you get those?' barked Monsadi.

'Err - b-back there, sir,' whimpered the scared citizen.

The guard confiscated the offending items (which proved quite tasty), and sent Enak about his business. From the citizen's description, there were two very odd characters nearby - capturing one or both could earn the guard a way out of this unwanted assignment. Monsadi set off eagerly in search of the strangers.

The Doctor was still determinedly trying to seek information from the citizens. Romana sat quietly, perched on K9's back observing her companion's futile efforts.

The Doctor was pacing alongside a man as he hurriedly crossed the town square.

'Excuse me, have you seen Calufrax?' the Doctor inquired. 'It's a sort of planet...'

The man turned and dashed away.

The Doctor halfheartedly pursued the fleeing citizen, shouting, '...About fourteen thousand kilometres across, oblate spheroid...!'

No sooner had the Doctor come to a halt than he spotted two more citizens, a man and 21

a woman, wandering through the square. He hurried over to them. 'Ah, excuse me; I'm looking for a planet that's called Calufrax. It's about fourteen thousand kilometres across and it's an oblate spheroid and it's covered in ice...' Once again, the citizens hurried away, desperate to give the Doctor a wide berth.

Frustrated at his lack of success, the Doctor tried shouting rhetorically into the air.

'Has anybody seen a planet called Calufrax?' The silence that followed was deafening.

'Funny, nobody's seen it.'

A cry of pain came from a nearby dwelling. 'The life force is dead! The life force is dead!'

'Well, at least someone's around anyway,' observed the Time Lord.

'We're all murderers! Murderers!' continued the shouting.

'It came from over there,' observed Romana.

'You stay here,' the Doctor told Romana and K9. 'I'll go and see.' He disappeared in search of the source of the shouting.

Lacking anything more interesting to do, Romana took the Doctor's brass telescope from her belt and began to survey the mountainous horizon. She had noticed a strange black structure on high earlier. She soon found it again - it seemed to be composed of three upright cylindrical structures alongside each other, set into the side of the highest peak. I wonder who uses that, thought Romana, and for -

Suddenly the telescope was snatched from her grasp by a gauntlet-clad hand. She found a burly, sneering man in military uniform looking at her. He began to circle her slowly and closely, clutching the telescope.

'This is a forbidden object.'

'Why?' asked Romana, having developed an immediate dislike of this person.

'That is a forbidden question,' he replied unhelpfully. 'You are a stranger?'

'Well, yes.'

'Strangers are forbidden! Where are you from?'

'I'm from another world. A different planet.'

‘There are no other worlds, it is a forbidden concept! How did you get here?’

‘I came with the Doctor,’ said Romana, but instantly regretted her rash words. It would have been better if the guard thought she was alone - then at least one of them might stay free.

‘Who is -’ began Monsadi.

Romana cut him off quickly. ‘Ah, now don’t tell me. Doctors are forbidden as well.’

Her sarcasm succeeded in distracting him.

‘You are now under arrest - come!’ he ordered, jabbing her viciously in the back with the butt of his energy weapon. One outsider in custody would meet his purposes, he reasoned. Let someone else risk their neck trying to capture the male - he was probably more dangerous anyway.

K9 observed Romana’s detention and was about to emerge from behind a pillar to stun the guard when Romana called out, ‘No K9, you mustn’t!’

Monsadi was mystified at this sudden outburst, not having seen K9. ‘What did you say?’ he demanded.

‘What I said was - no K9, you mustn’t - fetch the Doctor.’

The guard thought it best to ignore this idiocy. ‘You’re mad - move!’ he bellowed, and gave her another jab for good measure.

Unnoticed by Monsadi, K9 moved quietly off in the opposite direction.

Balaton was wailing at his wits’ end. ‘We’re done for – they must have heard him. They 22

must be nearly here. They’ll take him just as they took Komnor, just as they took Tralakis, just as they tried to take your father.’

Mula and Kimus were trying to restrain Pralix, who was thrashing about incoherently on his bed.

‘We must hide him,’ the young woman said.

‘You can’t hide him forever,’ replied Kimus.

All of them heard the sound of the bead curtain at the dwelling’s entranceway being pushed aside and the heavy stomp of boots coming into the main room. Was it the Mentiads or the Captain’s guards? Balaton looked fearfully at the entranceway and was bewildered to see neither. Instead a tall, shambolic figure filled the archway. A

mass of curly hair surrounded a mobile face with the wrinkles of many smiles. The man's garb marked him as an outsider to Balaton's eyes.

'Excuse me,' asked the arrival. 'Are you sure this planet's meant to be here?'

Kimus could see the old man was too stunned to answer, so he stepped forward to question this strange visitor. 'Who are you?'

'Ah, now that's a bit tricky. Most beings I encounter usually find it easiest just to call me the Doctor, actually.'

'The Doctor - are you a healer?' asked Mula hopefully.

The man's face broke into a wide, beaming smile. 'Well - I've saved quite a few things in my times - people, planets, entire populations, that sort of thing. What seems to be the problem here?'

Balaton guessed what was coming next, and tried to stop his granddaughter by putting a hand on her shoulder, but she shook it off and stepped closer to the stranger. 'It's my brother - he's terribly ill - could you have a look at him?'

'Of course! Where is he?' asked the Doctor. While Mula and Kimus brought Pralix into the main room and lay him down on a padded bench, the Time Lord glanced around the dwelling and winced at the garish decor. Then he crouched by the feverish young man and made a quick check of his vital signs. 'He's in a state of shock.'

'He does this every time the Captain announces a new golden age of prosperity,' explained Mula.

'What - every time?'

'Well, the last two or three times, yes.'

Balaton stood back from the stranger, nervously wringing his hands. Could this person be trusted? Did they even have a choice? The old man realised the Doctor was approaching him.

'Tell me about this Captain - pleasant sort of chap, is he?'

'We've never seen him,' Mula offered.

'But he is great and good,' said Balaton. 'He looks after us and makes us rich.'

'He makes us his fools,' said Kimus bitterly.

'Really? That's a very interesting observation,' noted the Doctor. He was approaching Kimus to quiz him further when a cry from Pralix halted him.

'Mentiads!'

The Doctor paused. 'Mentiads? I've heard that somewhere before.'

The Captain sat in the com, speaking in a murmur. 'We're surrounded by incompetents, Polly, you and I... incompetents and fools...'

He was talking to Avitron. The mechanical parrot was perched on the edge of his private console, cooing soothingly at its master. The Captain had created the deadly toy as a diversion for himself. He was in constant, searing pains from wounds sustained during his 23

arrival on this world, and the huge exoskeleton that kept the remains of his human body alive in stasis also preserved his private agonies.

So he created the Polyphase Avitron. As a Black Star buccaneer in an Agran pirate fleet he had been fascinated with tales of the original pirates on the planet Terra and mod-elled himself after these mythic figures. For an elaborate joke he had built the robot parrot to match the pets chosen by many of the original pirates. The bionic bird had an extra purpose - it served as his executioner when someone failed the Captain, and was a useful de-terrent against others who would do the same.

'You're my only true friend,' the Captain told Avitron. 'But never mind, Polly - not long now. Not long now before it's finished. We'll be free.' His sensors detected an approaching presence and he swiveled to receive the latest bulletin from Fibuli.

'Captain, Captain, sir, the Mentiads are marching, sir.'

'Vultures of death - ghouls!'

'They must have located another rogue telepath,' said the deputy.

Fibuli had a withering ability to state the obvious, thought the Captain.

'Channel 21, sir,' Fibuli added helpfully. 'Sector Five.'

The Captain activated a view screen suspended over the Bridge's entranceway, and it displayed the rambling renegades striding resolutely across rolling, green hillsides towards the planet's largest settlement. The Captain linked his vocal output to the communication systems fitted into every guard's helmet. 'Sector Five. The Mentiads are heading towards Sector Five. The telepath must not be taken. Find him and destroy him - or by all the suns that blaze, I'll tear you apart.' He paused, 'Molecule from molecule,' he cackled mania-cally.

Rusoh was terrified but determined not to show it to the four other guards under his command. The quintet was crouched at the bottom of a hill in sector five, waiting for the dreaded Mentiads to appear. All his life, the guard (first class), had been taught to hate and fear the Mentiads, been told about their terrible mental powers. He had even been present when two young men were executed by guards to stop them being

spirited away by the zombies for their own, evil ends. Now Rusoh had to lead a cadre of troops against the Mentiads on the march.

He glanced at the faces of his comrades and saw similar feelings etched into their features. They had all been diverted from watching over the old entranceway and lift-shaft to the mines to intercept the Mentiads before the zombies could reach the settlement. The bit-terest irony of it all was that Rusoh was not a particularly violent person. He had only joined the guards because it was a comfortable life and - except for the Mentiads - revolt on Zanak was unheard of. So much for a comfortable life, he thought ruefully.

Suddenly the Mentiads began appearing over the brow of the hill, marching relentlessly onwards in their yellow, loose-fitting robes. Rusoh stepped forward directly into their path, but the zombies did not pause or change direction. He raised his energy weapon and fired. He felt the energy bolt flash from the weapon but it deflected harmlessly away from the Mentiads.

The guard first class felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on end as the air about him began to crackle with psychic energy. The Mentiads were now all focusing their attention on him, and he felt like he was at the end of a long tunnel with something very terrible rushing towards him. He braced himself but still was not ready when the telekinetic jolt hit his body, flinging it across the hillside and crushing the life out of him.

Rusoh lay crumpled and still as the Mentiads marched past. The other guards cowered beside him, but he moaned just once and then all was darkness...

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An enraged Captain and his deputy watched all this on the Bridge view screen.

‘Idiot! Brainless fool!’ bellowed the Captain before overcoming his anger. He spoke again to the guards through their helmet communicators. ‘All guards - the Mentiads are heading towards Sector Six. Find the telepath. Find him and destroy him.’ The Captain and Fibuli watched on the viewscreen as the guards converged on Sector Six. As the minutes passed, the Captain grew ever more impatient ‘Find him!’ he bellowed into the communicator again. ‘Find him and destroy him. Search Sector Six.’

‘Er, Sector Seven,’ noted Fibuli, who had rechecked the sensor readings.

‘Search Sector Seven!’ the Captain ordered. He touched some controls, and the view screen image flickered several times, then paused at a courtyard within the settlement. A squat grey shape seemingly made of metal could be seen gliding through a courtyard in Sector Seven.

‘What in the planet’s name is that?’ questioned the Captain of no one in particular.

The Polyphase Avitron turned its head with a faint whirring noise, and appeared to intently study the robot dog displayed on the monitor.

As they watched, the dog entered one of the dwellings. 'Search that house!' the Captain ordered.

Kimus was amazed - the strangest thing he had seen in his young life was gliding through the bead curtain at the entrance to Balaton's dwelling. It was a squat, grey shape, like a series of dull metallic panels assembled in a vaguely animalistic form. The thing seemed to have a life of its own. It made a whirring noise and a box at its front that Kimus thought could be the head moved upwards. Most amazing of all - it spoke!

'Master,' stated a grating voice.

Balaton was terrified, and leapt from the path of this latest apparition. 'Save us, Captain, save us!' the old man cried out involuntarily.

Mula shrank back onto a bench near Pralix, ready to protect his brother from this thing. Kimus was fearful too, but determined not to show it. He stood his ground and realised the curious arrival was probably connected to their previous curious arrival. 'What is it?'

The Doctor glanced about their fearful faces, then beamed broadly. 'No, no, no, it's all right, it's all right; he's a friend of mine. Aren't you a friend of mine, K9?'

'Affirmative, master - friend,' replied the grey object.

The Doctor immediately ignored his robot companion and looked to Kimus and Balaton. 'Now then - tell me about the Mentiads.'

Balaton was even more unsure than ever of this stranger, but spluttered a reply.

'They are evil z-zombies, they have terrible powers.'

'Master -' K9 tried to interrupt.

'Mentiads - they're coming!' cried out Pralix.

'Mistress is in danger,' continued the mobile computer, but was ignored by the Doctor, who was now crouched by Pralix, whispering at the young man.

'What do the Mentiads want of you?'

Two guards toting energy weapons appeared in the front archway. Mula saw them first. 'Kimus, Kimus!' she cried, and ran to his side. The senior guard saw the feverish Pralix and recognised the signs of a telepath from previous executions.

'That's him - shoot!'

Both guards raised their weapons, but were instantly cut down by a beam of pure energy from K9's snout as the robot dog acted to protect his master. 'How long have you 25

stunned them for, K9?' asked the Doctor.

'Indefinitely, master.'

'Good, good.' The Time Lord cast a dismissive glance over the two slumped figures.

'Evil zombies? Terrible powers?'

'They're not Mentiads, explained Kimus. 'They were the Captain's guards.' He was developing a healthy respect for this person who had a servant that stopped the seemingly invincible soldiers with such ease.

'The Mentiads!' Pralix cried feverishly.

The Doctor hurried to Pralix's side, and whispered, 'The Mentiads, Pralix! Pralix, what is it?'

Pralix's condition provoked a wail from Balaton.

'Hide him - we must hide him! They must be nearly here. Oh, the Captain's way was best,' sobbed the old man, sinking to his knees.

Mula went to her grandfather's side. 'They're coming. There's no way that we can hide him.'

'No, you're cowards, both of you,' said Kimus. 'We must fight. We're not going to be pampered, frightened vegetables any more!' His bravado was cut short by the silent arrival of the yellow-robed zombies they all feared so much.

The Doctor was continuing his attempt to help Pralix. 'Pralix, can you hear my voice?'

The Doctor eventually realised the others had stopped bickering, and stood up to find a group of sunken-eyed strangers in the front archway. 'What is it? Hello! Are you by any chance the Mentiads?' he asked cheerfully. He continued after a stony silence, 'Well, it's just that you look like Mentiads to me.'

The group turned as one and regarded him. A yellow beam of energy surged out from their eyes and slammed the Doctor against the nearest wall, forcing the breath from his body. K9 shot a full force energy beam at the attackers, but it dissipated harmlessly before it could reach them.

The Doctor recovered enough to gasp out a few words, 'Well, you see, what I thought was that ah -'

He was cut short by another surge of power pouring from the Mentiads. His body crumpled and he fell to the floor, seemingly lifeless...

26

4

The Omens

Somebody was about to die on the Bridge.

Fibuli and the other technicians were lined up shoulder to shoulder in the control chamber, all quaking inwardly. The Captain prowled about them, like a hunting animal stalking its prey.

‘Gentlemen, the rogue telepath has not been destroyed - I ordered that he should be so.

He’s been allowed to fall into the hands of the Mentiads - I ordered that he should not be so allowed.’ The Captain emerged from behind the men so he could see the fear on their faces. ‘Failure is something I find very hard to come to terms with - right, Mr Fibuli?’

‘Oh yes, sir, very true, sir,’ stammered the reply.

The Captain strode to the com and -

...The angel blazed white...

- Staggered for a moment as the vision struck him again. He steadied his huge exoskeleton and stood still, facing away from the technicians. ‘By all the flaming moons of Heretes, not two hours since you very nearly blew up every engine in this mountain!’

‘Yes sir, b-b-but the cause was external, you said so yourself,’ replied Fibuli, turning the Captain’s words back against him. ‘Something extraordinary happened to the whole fabric of the space-time continuum at that moment.’

‘Have you discovered the cause of that yet?’ the Captain demanded.

‘Not yet sir, busy working on it, sir.’

A slim female figure clad in white entered the Bridge, but to the Captain she seemed to be a flaming silhouette, full of pure fury and hunger like some deathly angel. He

looked to the others but none seemed to share his perception, his sense of doubt and doom. An execution! An execution would appease her hunger for the moment. He turned back to the technicians.

‘Then you have failed to find it, Mr Fibuli. Failed, failed, failed! When someone fails me, someone dies!’ The Captain raised his android arm and the Polyphase Avitron rose with it into the air. It dived onto its prey with a metallic shriek of triumph, attacking the technician at the far end of the line from Fibuli. The man threw up an arm to protect himself, but death was delivered swiftly and mercilessly. Avitron settled lightly atop the smoking corpse and looked to its master for further orders.

The Captain fixed his deputy with a cold stare. ‘I hope you find the cause very soon, Mr Fibuli. I hope you will not fail me again.’

‘No sir, I wouldn’t dream of it sir. Thank you sir.’ Fibuli stumbled away in a cold sweat, his palms wet with his own blood where the nails of his clenched fists had broken the skin.

The Polyphase Avitron flew back to its perch on the Captain’s shoulder. ‘Who’s a pretty Polyphase Avitron?’ cooed the Captain as he stroked it.

The female dressed in white suddenly grabbed his wrist. ‘Captain, you must watch that blood pressure,’ she said sternly.

27

Balaton was grieving the loss of his only grandson. ‘They have taken him from us, those evil - evil...’ He broke down into sobs, comforted by Mula.

Kimus stood by the Doctor’s body, which he had laid out on the bench so recently occupied by Pralix. Who was this strange man who stood up to the Mentiads, the most feared people on Zanak? Who regarded the brutal Captain’s guards as a minor annoyance? His garb was so alien in fabric and style to the young man, and the Doctor had been so igno-rant of local affairs. Could he be from beyond the mountains, or somewhere even further away? And why had he come here now? Kimus pushed these musings aside as the Doctor began to regain consciousness. ‘Doctor?’

The Time Lord winced, clutching a hand to his forehead. ‘What hit me?’

‘The Mentiads did something. I don’t know what I can tell you,’ replied Kimus.

‘I wasn’t asking you. What hit me, K9?’

The robot dog whirled into life. ‘A gestalt-generated psycho-kinetic blast, master, on a wavelength of 338.79 micropars, with over-interference patterns reaching a peak power level of 5347.2 on the Vantalla Psychoscale.’

‘5347.2!’ exclaimed the Doctor, sitting up abruptly.

‘Affirmative, master.’

‘That’s what I thought. Couldn’t you have protected me?’

‘Negative, master.’

‘What’s the Vantalla Psychoscale?’ asked Kimus.

‘A measurement of psychokinetic force,’ replied the Doctor.

‘Psycho-what?’

‘The power to move physical objects by mental power alone. Not much is known about it, but 5347.2 on the Vantalla scale represents the power that will move a single teacup 5347.2 miles. Or 5347.2 teacups one mile. Or an entire Gallifreyan ceremonial dinner service 25.462875 miles...’

Balaton approached the Doctor, his face awash with tears. ‘Pralix has gone – the Mentiads have taken him!’

The Doctor got up to comfort the old man. ‘Don’t worry, don’t worry, I’ll find him.’

‘If he’s still alive,’ Kimus chipped in gloomily.

‘Do you know where the Mentiads live?’

‘No, they just arrive in the city and then depart,’ said the young man. ‘They’re all too scared to follow them.’

‘They? Who’s “they”?’

‘The cowards who live here.’

‘You’re not frightened?’

‘No!’ replied Kimus forcefully.

‘You just didn’t get around to it, is that it?’ asked the Doctor wryly.

Kimus blushed. ‘I mean, I will follow them.’

‘So will I,’ said the Doctor, and turned to Mula questioningly.

‘And so will I!’ she resolved.

Balaton was stunned by this and went to her side in the hope of persuading the young woman away from this act of folly. ‘No, Mula, haven’t we lost enough already? Pralix is gone, lost, nothing will bring him back from the Mentiads, curse their zombie souls. Don’t you understand Mula, Pralix is dead!’

‘No, he won’t be dead,’ the Doctor assured the old man. ‘They wanted him too badly to kill him. They needed him. I felt that in the psycho-blast, a very strong sense of need, or purpose...’

‘If he’s alive we’ll find him,’ vowed Mula.

28

‘No! You’ll only lose your own life...!’ Balaton protested.

‘I must go, Grandfather.’

‘The old man’s afraid he’s going to have no one to pamper him in his old age,’ Kimus interjected scornfully.

Mula was shocked at his words. ‘Oh, Kimus!’

‘Respect, Kimus! Respect!’ Balaton reminded him.

‘Respect! What for?’ Kimus challenged. ‘A lifetime of taking the path of least resistance? I’d have more respect for half a pint of water. At least it wouldn’t grovel as well.’

‘He doesn’t mean it the way it sounds, Grandfather...’ Mula insisted.

‘Master,’ said K9, but was ignored.

‘Are we going to stand around shouting at each other all day, or are we going to work out some way of finding the Mentiads?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Master -’ K9 tried again.

‘Not now, K9, not now,’ said the Doctor, deep in thought. ‘Now, K9, can you track the Mentiads by their psycho-spore?’

‘Affirmative, master. Psycho kinetic energy on that level leaves considerable disturbance in the ether.’

‘Excellent, excellent. Right - who’s coming? Kimus? Mula?’ Both nodded. ‘Balaton?’

The old man could hardly believe his ears. He could understand that young fool Kimus chasing after this unknown individual who appeared on the doorstep with trouble following him, but Mula too! It’s all too much for me, thought Balaton. ‘No, I don’t want any part of this madness - I don’t want to hear about Mentiads, guards, madness...’ he ranted, as he stumbled off to his rest chamber for a nice lie down.

‘All right, all right,’ replied the Doctor. ‘Romana?’ He looked around for his companion. ‘Romana? Where’s Romana?’

‘She has been arrested, master,’ stated K9.

‘What?’

‘She sent me to inform you.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘I made four attempts, master, but you would not allow me to tell you, master,’ said the mobile computer, almost sulkily.

‘Who is Romana?’ asked Mula.

‘My assistant. Stupid girl, getting herself arrested. Well, I suppose we’d better go and bail her out.’

‘Bail?’ queried Kimus.

‘You don’t have bail here? Oh dear, it just means two rescue attempts,’ said the Doctor after a moment’s thought. ‘After all, Romana’s got the Tracer, you see.’ Kimus and Mula did not see or understand, but the Time Lord carried on anyway. ‘Now - where will they have taken her?’

‘To the Bridge,’ said Mula.

‘No one ever comes back from the Bridge,’ added Kimus.

‘Except the guards,’ concluded Mula.

‘No one?’ asked the Doctor.

After a march across the settlement, Romana and Monsadi reached the guards’ aircar landing zone. The guard gave his captive another jab in the back with his energy weapon, pushing her towards his aircar. ‘Get in!’ The craft looked like an elongated triangle with curved edges.

‘I shall take that as an invitation,’ replied Romana haughtily. She handed Monsadi the 29

brass telescope she’d been carrying. ‘Thank you,’ she said graciously, and climbed aboard the aircar. ‘Will you drive? I assume you know where we’re going.’

Monsadi gritted his teeth at this insolence and got into the pilot’s seat. Once they were airborne and heading for the black structure set into the mountain range, Romana began another of her infuriating attempts at small talk.

‘I had an aircar rather like this once - it was a present for my seventieth birthday.’

The guard grimaced behind the reinforced leather of his helmet and visor. Would this woman never cease her infernal prattling?

Romana continued, ‘Did you know if you realign the magnetic vectors and fit a polarity oscillator, you get twice the speed for half the energy? You should try it sometime. It’s quite simple.’

Monsadi found himself becoming slightly hysterical at Romana’s non-stop babble. He activated his communicator as he accelerated the aircar towards the Bridge. ‘Guard 3VX to Bridge. Come in, please. Please come in...’

Kimus picked up the second guard’s body and put it in Pralix’s rest chamber beside the other. Retribution would follow once their deaths were discovered. The young man hoped the Doctor could help him prevent that. ‘They’ll be better off there, until we can dispose of them properly,’ the Doctor had told him. ‘You don’t want them cluttering up your living room, do you?’

Kimus pulled the fabric curtain over the small room’s archway and looked over at Mula, the woman he loved. She was talking with the mysterious outsider.

The Doctor produced a fist-sized coin of dull metal from one of his many pockets.

‘Right - heads we go after Romana first, tails we go after Pralix first, mmm?’ He tossed the coin upwards, then caught it and slapped it down on the back of his left hand.

‘Tails,’ called Mula.

‘Heads,’ countered the Doctor. He pulled away his right hand to reveal the coin face.

‘Heads it is.’

‘How can you take such a dangerous decision like that?’ fumed Mula. ‘Just leaving it to chance.’

The Doctor twirled the coin to show both sides had heads motifs. ‘Well, two kings on Aldebaran III, you see.

‘That’s not fair!’ she protested.

‘Oh yes it is. If my guess is correct, Romana’s in much greater danger than Pralix.

Now – how do we get to this Bridge?’

‘Well I’m not going there, I’m going after Pralix.’ Mula started stomping towards the front archway. The Doctor tried to call her back but the young woman was determined to go. ‘I’ll find my own way!’ she yelled as she disappeared from view.

‘It’s no use once she’s made up her mind,’ said Kimus. ‘I’ll have to go after her myself.’

The Doctor put a restraining hand on the young man’s shoulder. ‘No, no, no, you stay here.’

‘But Mula needs -’

‘I need you, she’ll be all right.’ The Doctor turned to his robot companion. ‘K9.’

‘Master?’

‘I’m putting Mula in your charge. Take her to the Mentiads, but look after her. Is that clearly understood?’

‘Affirmative, master.’ The mobile computer began to leave the dwelling.

‘Off you go - and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. We’ll follow along later.’

30

‘I hate people who say things like that, don’t you?’ said the Doctor, when K9 had departed.

‘Like what?’ Kimus asked.

“‘Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.’”

‘Then why do you say it?’

The Doctor considered this for a moment. ‘I don’t know really. Just to see what it’s like. Come on.’

Soon afterwards, Kimus was nervously leading the Doctor through the settlement. The courtyards and alleys were virtually deserted, with most citizens at the Feast of Omens in the main courtyard. The young man held an energy weapon he had taken from one of the guard’s bodies at Balaton’s dwelling - it felt foreign and dangerous in his hands, but also powerful.

Finally the pair reached the northern edge of the settlement and Kimus pointed up high into the mountains. ‘That’s the Bridge, up there,’ he said, pointing at the black structure set into the tallest peak.

‘How do we get to it?’

‘We don’t,’ said Kimus with a mirthless laugh.

‘One of those, is it? How do the guards get there?’

‘Well, in their aircars.’

‘Aircars?’

Kimus pointed out one of the craft nearby. ‘There’s one over there.’ A guard sat dozing in the pilot’s seat.

‘Well, we’ll borrow it,’ decided the Doctor.

‘Borrow it!’ spluttered the young man. ‘But it’s the Captain’s!’

‘Well, I don’t mind going first class, do you?’ replied the Time Lord with a wicked grin. ‘Come on!’ He pulled the depleted bag of jelly babies from his pocket and laid out a trail of them leading from the nose of the aircar across the courtyard and around some pillars. The Doctor then retreated behind the pillar closest to the aircar and tossed the bag with its remaining contents on to the front of the craft, waking the guard.

While Kimus and the Doctor watched from the safety of cover, the guard got out of the aircar and followed the trail of mysterious objects across the courtyard. The pair climbed into the aircar while the guard was still distracted by his sweet stalking. He heard the sound of an aircar powering up, and turned to see his own assigned craft disappearing into the air with two civilians steering it.

‘Bye, bye,’ called the Doctor happily, waving to the stunned soldier.

The guard waved an automatic reply, and then realised his predicament. He swallowed heavily.

‘You know that actually makes me feel guilty?’ the Doctor confessed to Kimus. ‘Poor fellow, he shouldn’t be out on the streets by himself.’

‘What was that you threw? Some deadly weapon?’

‘No, just a packet of jelly babies. Don’t worry, I’ve got plenty more. Would you like one?’

The white silhouette stood over the Captain, paralysing his will.

...The angel blazed white, aflame with...

Mr Fibuli’s approach broke the vision.

‘Er, Captain... Captain, sir...’

The Captain found the strength to speak restored. ‘Speak.’

‘Bad news, sir,’ ventured the deputy from a safe distance.

‘By the horns of the prophet Balag! Speak!’ The Captain became enraged but the angel silenced him again with a touch of her talons.

‘Sir, we have not yet discovered what caused our accident, but we think it may have been an unidentified materialisation within our own field. That would be consistent with the evidence, even just a meteorite slipping out of hyperspace at that moment could have caused it - but the point is, sir, that we have discovered more damage. The macromat field integrator has burnt out, sir. It’s one of the four components we can’t replace ourselves, sir.’ Fibuli paused, careful to avoid enraging the Captain more than was unavoidable.

‘Well, we are faced with two alternatives, Captain...’ A new thought occurred to the deputy. ‘Three alternatives. We could try to find a new macromat field integrator, though I can’t envisage how we would do that. Alternatively, there is a very rare mineral, PJX 1-8, which would conceivably do the same job as the integrator... if we could find any. Either way, sir, in our current condition we could only possibly make one more jump, and that would be risky... in the extreme.’

The Captain felt his strength returning as the angel stepped back, allowing him to speak. ‘And the third alternative, Mr Fibuli?’

‘Is for Zanak to, er, settle where it is, sir.’

Suddenly the angel blazed brighter than any supernova to the Captain’s unbalanced perceptions, and pain lanced through every atom of his being. He lashed out viciously, slamming his android arm down onto the private console at his side. ‘No, by the Sky Demon, I say no!’ Screens on the console shattered, debris of metal and circuitry flying everywhere.

At this moment, Romana arrived. Everyone on the Bridge stared at her. She stood quite still and brushed herself down in mock protest at being pushed into the room by two brusque guards. Then Romana raised her eyes to take in the surroundings.

The chamber was roughly cylindrical but seemed to be made up of many tall panels of circuitry controls and display units. Romana noted six technicians tending to these feverishly, as if working under great stress or pressure. A raised triangular dais dominated the Bridge and on a huge chair of metal and wiring sat a half-man, half-robot figure. It was flanked by two slight figures, one a harassed-looking man of middling years nervously fiddling with his glasses, the other a young woman in medical garb who held herself with a mocking, almost regal confidence. What a curious trio, thought Romana, then realised the seated giant was addressing her.

‘Speak girl! Who are you that you dare to intrude upon my ship?’

‘Interesting,’ Romana observed. ‘You call this mountain your ship. Bit cumbersome isn’t it?’

‘Your name girl...’ demanded the Captain.

‘Romana. Romanadvoratrelundar. Tell me, have you had an accident?’

‘Silence,’ the Captain ordered, but Romana was not so easily shut up.

‘I only ask because whoever patched you up obviously didn’t know much about the new developments in cyboneutraulics. Do you get a squeak when you move your arm like this?’ She raised her arm to demonstrate.

‘Silence,’ the Captain insisted. ‘Or the silence of death descends on you in the winking of an eye.’

In response, the red eye of the Polyphase Avitron lit up brightly.

‘Now,’ the Captain continued, ‘how have you come to this place?’

Romana had noted the Doctor favoured a policy of brazen honesty and decided to give it a try. ‘By TARDIS. I’m a Time Lord you see, or at least I will be soon. I’ve still got a 32

couple of qualifying exams to take, and all the dinners to eat as well, which is terribly dull but...’

‘By the mealy-mouthed Prophet of Agranjagzak, speak plainly. Obliteration is at hand!’ The Captain raised his android arm threateningly.

‘See. It does squeak, doesn’t it?’ Romana pointed out. ‘Now, the new frictionless bear-ings...’

‘I will not ask you again!’ the Captain thundered. ‘What is your function?’

‘Well, as a Time Lord, I can travel about in space and of course -’

The Captain cut her off dismissively. ‘Bah! Common space urchin - you shall die.’

‘- and, of course, time,’ concluded Romana superciliously. ‘Hence - Time Lord.’

The Captain stood and took a few steps towards this upstart. ‘Time travel?! You expect me to believe such nonsense?’

‘Yes, it is a difficult concept, isn’t it?’ Romana decided her host was clearly unbalanced, suffering from sufficient psychiatric illnesses to keep the medical dictionary writers of the planet T’salpo T’sale busy for several years.

The Captain decided he'd had enough of this off-worlder. 'Insolent breath of idle fantasy - death comes now!'

'Captain sir,' Fibuli interjected bravely, 'if what she says is true, perhaps she will have knowledge that can help us....'

'True? What can a puny slip of a girl know of such matters?'

'That's what my tutor used to say,' Romana observed. 'He didn't enjoy giving me a triple first at all.'

'She is a trespassing urchin, kill!' The Captain raised his android arm to send Avitron off for another execution but then the white-garbed woman behind him spoke.

'Captain, Captain. The excitement of more than one execution in a day is bad for your blood pressure. Perhaps you should postpone it till tomorrow.'

The Captain was in a quandary - could the angel be putting off another delivery of death? 'Postpone?'

'Yes,' said the slim woman, to Romana's relief. 'I think her story sounds quite interesting, even if it is idle fantasy.'

Romana thought the Nurse obviously believed it was more than idle fantasy. But what hold could this inconspicuous woman have over the lumbering Captain, she wondered.

'Captain...' Fibuli began.

'Yes, Mr Fibuli, I am light years ahead of you,' the Captain replied, and turned to Romana. 'Space urchin, sit down. We have much to discuss.'

'I'm not going to be put to death, after all?' asked Romana.

'Your reprieve is conditional on the truth of your story.'

'Oh good, I'd hate to be the cause of increasing your blood pressure, one of those joints might blow at any moment,' said Romana. She felt a chill run through her bones as the Nurse approached her, speaking in crisp, precise tones.

'Why don't you ask her how this machine she mentions travels?' the woman in white said, passing the off-worlder.

The Captain responded to his tormentor with a single word, almost spat out across the room at Romana. 'Speak!'

'Well roughly speaking - and putting it terribly simply - it dematerialises in one location, passes through a space-time vortex and then rematerialises again in a new location.'

Romana spoke as if addressing a remedial class back at the Academy, but the Captain, his deputy and the Nurse seemed to hang on every word.

The woman in white looked at the Captain. 'I think that sounds terribly interesting - don't you?' she said mockingly.

33

5

The Golden Age of Prosperity

Kimus was excited. Earlier today he had been complaining about the hollow, meaningless lives people were leading on Zanak. Since meeting the Doctor he had seen two of the hated Captain's guards pushed aside like unwanted food, another guard completely duped, and had helped 'borrow' an aircar. What was going to happen next, he wondered. 'Hey, this is marvellous - freedom at last!'

'You're not free yet,' said the Doctor sagely, as he piloted the aircar towards the Bridge.

'Free to think,' replied the young man. He looked at the huge green valley laid out below him like some rich, multi-coloured cloth. 'It's amazing. The city looks so pretty from up here. Yes, even the mines do. You know, that's our entire life, so small and claustrophobic. We're just being stifled with meaningless riches. Why have we traded in our freedom for that?'

'Tell me about those mines.'

'Well, we extract all the raw material we need from them.'

'Who goes down them - do you go down?'

Kimus shook his head. 'No.'

'The Mentiads?'

The young man just laughed. 'No!'

'No one?'

‘No, they’re automated, you see, we just run the equipment.’

‘What happens when they run out?’

‘Well, the Captain announces a new golden age of prosperity. They just fill up again,’ said Kimus blithely.

‘What, just like that?’ snorted a disbelieving Doctor.

‘Yes.’ Kimus paused and realised he hadn’t properly thought out how this took place.

‘Well, you don’t think that’s wrong, do you?’

‘Wrong? It’s an economic miracle - of course it’s wrong!’ was the stern reply.

The young man was rather crestfallen. ‘Oh, then, of course, the lights change.’

‘Oh?’

‘They’ll be new ones tonight.’

‘What lights?’

‘You know, the lights, the ones in the sky at night, the little points of light.’

‘You mean the stars?’

The word was strange to Kimus, but so much of what the Doctor said was new and difficult to understand. ‘Seems pointless to me, but the older people seem to like it.’

‘Oh not another lot. Does no one in this galaxy take any interest in the worlds around them?’

‘What?’

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‘Oh, never mind. I’ll send you a planetarium one day. Wait a moment... you say that every time the stars change, that’s the moment that the mines miraculously refill themselves with raw materials?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’ The puzzled man pointed down at a green plateau jutting out halfway up the rapidly approaching mountainside. ‘Look, down there - I think there’s some sort of entrance into the mountain.’

‘Might be the way to the Bridge,’ said the Doctor, and expertly banked the aircar onto a course for the landing area.

‘I say, you’re very good at this. Do you drive these things for a living?’ asked an envious Kimus.

‘No. I save planets, mostly, but this time I think I’ve arrived far, far too late.’

The Doctor guided the aircar down onto the plateau and parked it neatly in hover mode. The pair got out and went over to the mountainside where a seamless door was set into a huge metal panel, only distinguished by two locks and a handle. The eager Kimus reached it first and tried the handle, more out of habit than expectation of entry.

‘Well?’ asked the Doctor.

‘It’s locked. You’ll never get it open, it’s impossible.’

‘Ha! Impossible?’ snorted the Doctor. ‘That means it will take 73 seconds. Move over.’

‘What, you mean you can open it?’

‘Well of course I can open it! It’s just a question of how.’

‘How?’

‘I haven’t got the faintest idea,’ the Doctor confessed.

Kimus watched the Doctor dig in his pockets and pull out a long, rounded device like a metal writing instrument. The Doctor held it out towards the door and it made two slight singing noises. The off-worlder then leaned forward confidently and tried to open the door

– without success.

‘But it’s still locked,’ stated Kimus rather obviously.

‘I haven’t finished yet,’ replied the Doctor through gritted teeth. Another dig through his pockets, and he held up a very bent piece of wire. ‘Bent hairpin. The more sophisticated the technology, the more vulnerable it is to primitive attack. People often overlook the obvious’ He inserted the wire into the two locks and jiggled it about hopefully, then stood back and gave the door another good tug - still without success. The Doctor wandered off, scratching his head. Behind him, the door opened a moment later.

‘Doctor - that’s amazing!’

The Doctor smiled broadly. ‘Shall we go?’

Inside, a short corridor led to another doorway, but beyond that a further corridor curved away from them in a seemingly infinite arc.

‘Doctor, this goes on forever!’ said an astounded Kimus.

‘Yes, it certainly looks like it,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘Come on - we’d better hurry.’ Kimus sprinted out into the infinite corridor, running full pace, but made no progress beyond the doorway’s threshold. ‘Doctor, what’s happening?’ he called back.

The Doctor reached into the corridor, grabbed the young man and pulled him back through the doorway. ‘Come! Kimus, I want you to do something very important for me.

Go out to the aircar...’

‘Yes!’ nodded Kimus eagerly.

‘Fetch the guard’s gun...’

‘Right!’

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‘...and stand outside on guard.’

Kimus was mightily disappointed at being stopped on the brink of facing his world’s tormentor. ‘Oh, no, Doctor, I want to come with you!’

‘No, no, no, no, no. That’s the most valuable thing you can do. There are so many things in here you can’t understand and a linear induction corridor is one of them, hmm?’

replied the off-worlder, pointing down the apparently infinite corridor.

Kimus reluctantly nodded his agreement. The Doctor turned to a control panel by the doorway and his fingers flashed over the switches and buttons. Then he simply stepped through the doorway and began to be whizzed away, accelerating ever faster.

‘See you later!’ the Doctor called back to Kimus. ‘Fascinating,’ he said to himself.

I’ve never come across as smooth a ride as this before... or as fast.’ As the acceleration reached a dizzying pace, he jested out loud, ‘I’ll never be cruel to an electron in a particle accelerator again!’ Abruptly, the trip was over, and he found himself standing still at the corridor’s end. He stepped through another doorway into a small cubicle and the doorway slammed shut behind him.

‘Good heavens! Ahh - of course - it isn’t a linear induction corridor! It must work by neutralising inertia,’ he mused out loud. He noticed two flashing triangles on the wall beside him, pointing up and down. ‘A lift?’ he touched the upwards triangle and the elevation chamber began to rise through the mountain’s interior, towards the Bridge.

Back at the other end of the seemingly infinite corridor, Kimus tried his hand at the corridor's control unit - without success. He grumpily went back outside to the aircar and began his guard duty, already feeling thoroughly bored and left out of the action.

Romana was examining a metal framed cube full of charred wiring and cables, whilst seated rather cheekily in the com. Beside her, Fibuli hovered nervously while the Captain stood brooding on the opposite side of the Bridge, facing away from them.

'Space urchin, tell me, do you know what this is?' the Captain demanded.

Romana turned the scorched mechanism over in her hands. 'Oh, it's a ... no. Wait a minute, it's a ... no it isn't one of those either... Well, whatever it is, it's obviously burnt out.'

'A whining infant could tell me that. Your time is running out!' said the Captain.

'I'm sorry, I was never any good at antiques,' replied a self-righteous Romana, to the chagrin of her hosts. 'It's probably just an old macromat field integrator or something.'

Fibuli beamed in delight. 'Captain - she does know!'

The Captain turned and -

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die...'

- staggered for a moment, before pushing the vision from his mind. Why did this scene keep reoccurring, he wondered, before concentrating again on the off-worlder. 'By the beard of the Sky Demon, the jaws of death were hot about your neck.'

Romana was rapidly growing tired of the Captain's vacuous threats, and walked straight up to the towering figure. 'This must be part of a massive dematerialisation circuit,' she said, holding up the integrator.

'It's part of a system that transports us instantly through space,' the Captain stated proudly.

Romana was, for once, almost speechless. Almost, but not quite. 'You mean the whole mountain? You take this whole mountain with you through space? Amazing...!'

The Captain smiled to himself. The female obviously did not know all of Zanak's secrets yet - nor would she get the chance.

Romana went back to the com to study the integrator further. 'Well, what's happened

is that you've shorted out the multicorticold whizzbang...'

‘Whizzbang? What nonsense is this?’ the Captain stormed.

‘Whizzbang?’ replied Romana. ‘It’s short for whittlezantricon hyperbandrigic max-ivectometer. We’ve always called it a whizzbang because that’s the noise it makes. I think this one’s banged its last whizz though. You’d be lucky to get a phut out of it. Ah now, this is interesting. You’ve wired an ambicyclic photon bridge across the field terminals as a stabiliser. I always wanted to try that but my tutor said it would fuse, silly old goat. I’m glad to see that someone else has a little imagination ... oh, I see. It’s fused.’

Fibuli and the Captain consulted privately out of Romana’s hearing.

‘You think she can repair it, Mr Fibuli?’

‘Well, sir, in my opinion, it’s irreparable, but it occurs to me she must have something similar aboard her own vessel.’

‘Mr Fibuli, as ever I am light years in advance of you. By the evil eye of the Sky Demon she will not be needing her vessel again, for clearly she can never be allowed to leave Zanak.’

‘Agreed, Captain!’

The Captain bellowed across the Bridge at Romana. ‘Girl! What is your diagnosis - can it be repaired?’

‘Repaired? Yes, I should think so. You’d have to ask the Doctor though,’ she replied with a sideways glance at the Captain.

‘Doctor?! Are there more intruders on this planet?’

‘Oh yes, I’m only his assistant. He’s the one you should be talking to - or rather listening to, if you have the stamina,’ added Romana wryly.

The half-man, half-robot strode over to the two guards stationed within the Bridge.

‘All guards on alert. There is an intruder on the planet, his name is the Doctor, I repeat, the Doctor. He must be found and brought to the Bridge instantly.’

The two guards ran to the entranceway and activated its opening mechanism. ‘We must find the Doctor!’ the senior guard stated.

But while they were waiting for the door to rise far enough for them to exit, the Doctor crawled under the door and stood up, beaming at them. Romana watched delightedly as he immediately went to Mr Fibuli and began shaking his hand vigorously in a gesture of welcome.

‘Hello, hello.’ The Doctor draped a friendly arm around the hapless deputy’s shoulders and led him for a few paces, chattering away happily. ‘I’m the Doctor,

delighted to meet you, heard so much about what a splendid chap you are.' The new arrival caught sight of his companion across the room. 'I see, I see you've met my assistant Romana, getting on like a house on fire, are you? She's a lovely girl. What a splendid place you've got here,'

the Doctor said, taking in the surroundings at a glance. 'Are you having a spot of bother?'

All this was said in a whirlwind, and it took the Captain a moment to regain his self-control and spit out a command to his guards, 'Seize him!'

The Doctor seemed unimpressed by the welcome. 'Such hospitality - I'm underwhelmed.'

The Captain strode up to the off-worlder and scrutinised him closely. 'Doctor, beware, your manner appeals only to the homicidal side of my nature.'

'My manners are impeccable,' replied the Time Lord insolently. 'Oh, well I shall have to watch it then. Don't want to end up dead before I've had a chance to place my full services at your disposal.' He caught sight of the Captain's Polyphase Avitron. 'I say, what a magnificent parrot. I've always been fond of parrots, haven't I Romana? And so clever to have a mechanical one. Saves all that nasty clearing up.'

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'Apart from the bodies,' the Captain added meaningfully.

'Well, yes, quite... I beg your pardon?'

'My Polyphase Avitron carries death in its eyes. If you would avoid its lethal gaze, perhaps you would enlighten me as to these services you speak of.'

'I'd be very glad to. We, that is Romana and I, are patrolmen for the Astromobile As-sociation, and our job is to hop around the Universe doing on the spot repairs for stranded spacecraft. We happened to notice a disturbance in this area of space and just popped along to see if we could be of any assistance. Our rates are very reasonable, particularly if you carry a Galactibank Credit Card.'

'Doctor, how would it be if in return for your assistance I offered to spare your miserable life?' the Captain suggested coldly.

'More than generous,' the Doctor agreed. 'May I inspect the damage?'

Romana stepped between the two in an effort to distract the Doctor from further antagonising his newfound foe. 'Ah, Doctor? I think this is the root of the trouble.'

He gave the device she was holding a cursory glance. 'A macromat field integrator -

has the whizz-bang gone wrong?’

‘Yes, and the ambicyclic photon bridge.’

‘And the ambicyclic photon bridge?’ The Doctor, still gripped by two guards, turned to the Captain. ‘Do you mind if I examine this, locust?’

The Captain’s systems nearly overloaded with rage. ‘Locust? Arrgh!’

A timely intervention by Fibuli prevented the Doctor’s immediate execution. ‘Sir!

Captain!’

The Captain calmed himself sufficiently to speak again. ‘Release him! Take them to the engine room. If they make one mistake - kill them!’

The Doctor gave the Captain a mocking salute as he exited the Bridge. Romana was about to follow him out when she paused. ‘Oh, Mr Fibuli?’

‘Mmm?’ replied Fibuli.

Romana casually threw Fibuli the integrator. ‘Catch!’

Mula was beginning to regret her quick temper. She had been able to follow the Mentiads out of the settlement but was lost soon afterwards so she had turned round to go back to her grandfather’s dwelling. A metallic voice stopped her taking a further step.

‘I will be your guide.’

The young woman looked around and saw the metal creature K9 approaching.

‘What?’ she asked.

‘I can locate the Mentiads for you. My circuits can trace them by their psychic energy.

My master, the Doctor, commanded me to take you to the Mentiads, but ensure no harm befalls you. Master and Kimus will reunite with you later.’

Mula thought for a moment and then realised she had little other choice. Still she wondered where the others had gone, and asked K9 about this.

‘Their words indicated an attempt to gain access to the Bridge.’

‘But that’s madness!’ she protested.

‘My master’s actions rarely seem logical, but are consistently successful in the final analysis. I am now departing for the Mentiads’ dwelling chamber - you may follow

if you wish.’ The mobile computer whirred into life and trundled away towards the eastern end of the mountain range.

Mula watched for a moment and finally, reluctantly, followed.

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6

The Mines of Zanak

After being taken down more than twenty levels in an elevation chamber and marched along a bewildering maze of corridors, Romana and the Doctor were pushed into the engine room by the two guards escorting them. Like much of the Bridge’s super-structure, it was cylindrical, but the ceiling was so high it seemed almost beyond sight. Two massive columns aglow with the crackle of massive power surged down through the room and into the grille floor. Banks of circuitry and controls lined the walls and a spiral staircase snaked up around the outer wall.

‘Oh! Look at that Romana!’ the Doctor exclaimed, his voice echoing across the vast chamber.

‘Amazing,’ gasped Romana, and the Doctor agreed. ‘I suppose you’re going to tell me you’ve seen it all before,’ she said.

‘No, actually - not like this.’

‘Really?’

‘Really. But I suspected something of the kind. Come on, let’s look busy!’ he urged, and marched briskly towards the console, examining the readouts. Above them, the Captain and Fibuli emerged onto the staircase from a doorway part way up the wall and stood watching the off-worlders.

‘What do you mean you sus-’ began Romana, but was cut short by a look from the Doctor. She lowered the volume of her voice and tried again. ‘What do you mean, you suspected?’

‘Gravitic analyser input reading 9.5!’ the Doctor stated loud enough for the Captain to hear.

‘Gravitic analysing input, 9.5 – check!’ Romana responded.

‘I mean, I had my suspicions,’ the Doctor said in a hushed tone of voice.

‘You mean you knew they were here? You knew that this mountain’s really a spaceship and it’s broken down?’

‘More or less, yes.’

‘But how, how did you know?’

The Doctor potted about the machinery, studying the different elements before replying with a smile, ‘Well, I just put 1.795372 and 2.204628 together.’

‘And what does that mean?’

The Doctor shouted upwards at the Captain, ‘Four!’

Romana echoed his announcement. ‘Four!’ and noted it down on a clipboard she had picked up from a nearby bench.

Up on the stairway, the Captain and Fibuli were watching the off-worlders closely.

‘What are they after, Captain? What do they want here?’

‘That is what we must find out. We must let them lead us into their vessel. My guards

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have tried to gain entry to it but have - failed.’ The Captain growled out the last word like it was an insult to every bone and servomechanism in his being. ‘So, we must allow them a little rope. At all events I hold the trump card.’

‘What’s that?’

‘The Ace of Death. It will be played Mr Fibuli, it will be played.’

The Captain suddenly became aware of the woman in white standing beside them. He couldn’t be sure how she had suddenly managed to appear there without him detecting her approach, and it bothered him greatly.

‘You think of death too much Captain,’ she observed. ‘Life is to be cherished, preserved.’

‘The Ace of Death will be played,’ the Captain insisted.

‘The Queen is the highest card, Captain. Ace scores low.’

Below, the subjects of this discussion were themselves speaking in whispers. ‘Romana, we are in very, very, very grave danger.’

‘What, from the Captain?’ replied Romana, puzzled as she glanced up at their apparent foe.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, he’s just a terrible old bully. All that “by the evil nose of the Sky Demon” nonsense is just bluster.’

‘The Captain is a very clever and very dangerous man,’ hissed the Doctor. ‘He’s playing with us. He wants to find out why we’ve come here.’

The blithe smile drained from Romana’s face as she realised that the Doctor was deadly serious. She pulled the Tracer from her belt. ‘The reason why we’ve come here is to find the second segment of the Key, in case you’d forgotten. Getting involved in all this

—’

‘Is the only way to find it,’ the Doctor concluded for her. ‘What does the Tracer say?’

Romana activated it, but just a confused, constant crackling signal was emitted. ‘I just don’t understand it. It seems to give out a continuous signal wherever we go.’

‘That’s it, then,’ whispered the Doctor, putting a hand over the Tracer to deactivate it.

‘What?’

‘The answer, Romana. We’ve stumbled on one of the most heinous crimes ever committed in this galaxy! We’ve got to get out of here, and get out of here quickly. Come on, we’ve got to get off the Bridge and back down to the City somehow. That’s where we’ll find the answer. I’ve learnt all I want to know from this.’ He turned, and bellowed upwards jovially to their hosts.

‘Ah, Captain? I think we’ve got to the root of the problem here. Your magnifactoid eccentricalometer is definitely on the blink. Can we have a chat about it?’

Fibuli whispered an aside to the Captain, ‘Do you think he seriously believes this mountain is the spaceship?’

‘I think he suspects the truth. But the truth will not help him stay alive,’ the Captain replied quietly. He knew the Doctor was bluffing, but it suited his purposes to play along -

for now. He shouted down to the Doctor, ‘You know what will happen if I even begin to suspect you of sabotage...’

‘Sabotage?’ replied the Doctor innocently. ‘Captain, it’s more than my reputation’s worth!’

‘Or your life?’

‘Or my life, as you say, yes, yes,’ the Doctor agreed hurriedly. ‘We’ve got to go back to our own ship now and prepare some special equipment.’

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‘The girl stays here,’ said the Captain. It was a statement, not a request.

The Doctor was ready for this. ‘Oh, well, I’m afraid that’s not possible. You see, we have a special lock fitted to the TARDIS door and it requires the physical presence of both of us to open it - that’s clever, don’t you think?’

‘By the triple-headed hound of death, you lie!’

‘Oh no, no, it’s an obvious precaution, wouldn’t you say? With all that valuable equipment lying around?’

The Captain actually thought it was patent drivel, but allowing this bluff to continue could unlock the vessel’s secrets. ‘Guards, escort them to their ship,’ he ordered. ‘Any attempt to escape is to be met with instant obliteration,’ he added ominously.

The Doctor replied with a two-handed salute this time. ‘It’s a pleasure to work with you, Captain!’ The gangling Gallifreyan trotted off happily towards the engine room’s exit, leading Romana and the two guards. ‘Come on, don’t just stand there - escort us!’

The Captain watched furiously as the guards followed the Doctor and Romana out of the engine room. ‘Death’s asteroid, Mr Fibuli, it will be a delight to kill that man. Won’t it my pretty?’ He stroked the Polyphase Avitron, which had been perched quietly on his shoulder. The robot parrot hissed menacingly.

The Doctor was trying to be funny, Romana decided. He was tapping on the helmet of the guard in front of them as they whizzed out from the mountain’s core on the inertia neutralisation corridor.

‘You know I wouldn’t have your job for the world. Standing around all day looking tough must be very wearing on the nerves, mm?’ asked the Time Lord. He raised his voice to a bellow to be heard above the noise generated by the corridor. ‘I said standing around all day looking tough must be very wearing on the nerves!’

Outside the entranceway to the mountain, Kimus was bored. It seemed as if he had been here forever. He plucked disinterestedly at some greenery growing on the plateau’s surface. The young man did not notice the guard creeping towards him from a pathway leading up to the plateau.

The two guards and their captives exited from the almost infinite corridor, and walked towards the entranceway. The Doctor was still burbling away to himself. 'Long hours, violence, no intellectual stimulation...'

The foursome emerged on to the plateau. Kimus spotted them, and yelled 'Doctor!' He fired immediately, downing one of the guards with the borrowed energy weapon.

An energy bolt shot over the Doctor's shoulder and he saw the guard creeping up behind Kimus. The Doctor threw himself and Romana to the ground to avoid being hit in the crossfire. Then he shouted to Kimus about the other guard trying to outflank the young man. Kimus twirled and fired in one motion, missing his target by a vast distance. But the energy bolt threw off the guard's aim, and his next shot ended up winging the other guard escorting the two time travellers. Kimus finally corrected his aim and loosed off a bolt that hit the guard on the pathway with deadly accuracy.

Once all the firing was over, the Doctor stood up, brushed himself down and looked at the wounded guard who was just losing consciousness. 'And now this happens - I'd give it up if I were you.' He looked up as their saviour approached them. 'Kimus!'

'Doctor?' Kimus greeted the Doctor and a woman he presumed was the formerly detained Romana. His blood was still racing from the excitement of the gun battle.

'We've got a lot of travelling to do,' announced the Doctor.

'Where are we going?' asked the exhilarated young man.

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'To investigate your miraculous mines - come on!'

Balaton was thinking of ways to hide the fallen guards' bodies when two soldiers entered his dwelling. They began searching the home, and soon found the corpses of their dead colleagues, and the old man cowering nearby.

'I had nothing to do with this,' Balaton simpered. 'It was an off-worlder, a man called the Doctor in strange garb.'

Outside the dwelling, Enak was hurrying past on his way back from the Feast of Omens when he overheard this exchange. He paused outside a window in Pralix's rest chamber, peeking in at the confrontation.

'Off-worlders are forbidden on Zanak - you lie, old man!' the senior guard shouted at Balaton. 'For your insolence you shall be executed!'

'No, no, I am a loyal servant of the Captain!' cried out the old man, falling to his knees and begging for mercy. 'I am innocent, a loyal -'

His words were cut short by the cruel pumping of an energy bolt after bolt into his frail body. The charred body of Balaton crumpled to the floor, dying as he had lived - on his knees.

Outside the dwelling, Enak was in shock from witnessing this horror, this senseless murder. If the guards knew he had seen this, he too would be shot down. The citizen ran away, desperately seeking a hiding place. Balaton had been one of Zanak's most respected elders, if something of a fussy fool and a slave to the Captain's regime. Enak's mind reeled that an elder could be so callously executed. He decided to go back to the Feast and tell the other elders - something had to be done to protest this murder...

The Doctor flew the stolen aircar toward the mines with Romana and Kimus as his passengers.

'What did you make of those engines, Romana?' the Doctor asked his companion.

'Is this a test?' she replied.

'If you like.'

She considered for a moment. 'Very similar in principle to an old F-type TARDIS engine, but no temporal dislocation facility...'

'What?'

'It can't travel in time.'

'It's much simpler like that isn't it?' the Doctor observed. 'Long words were only invented to confuse the enemy and make your Professor feel wanted.'

'First you tell me we're in terrible danger, then you stop to give me a lesson in semantics!' Romana protested.

'All right, cleverclogs, what else did you notice about those engines? Didn't you think they were very...'

'Hyperdimensional?' Romana suggested.

'No.'

'Analogically cross-matricised?'

'No.'

'Needed dusting?'

'Yes, but no.'

‘Tangentially aligned to the STC curve?’

‘No.’

‘All right, what then?’

‘Give up?’

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‘Yes,’ Romana conceded.

‘Big.’

‘Big? Well of course they’re big, he’s flying that entire mountain through space.’

‘Did he tell you he was flying the mountain?’ the Doctor inquired.

‘No, but... oh.’

‘Listen, the power of a transdimensional mat-demat engine increases exponentially with its size.’

‘Yes?’

‘So?’ the Doctor persisted.

‘Oh!’ Romana suddenly realised. ‘You mean those engines are shifting something much bigger than a mountain.’

‘Much, much, much bigger,’ he confirmed.

Kimus had been quietly listening in on their conversation, feeling very much out of his depth. He didn’t understand much of what the Doctor and Romana were on about, but he was able to direct them. ‘Doctor, we’re very close to the mines,’ he said, pointing towards the ground far below. ‘Down there do you see? They’ll be closed down now - it’s nearly nightfall.’

‘Good. We should be able to land undetected,’ the Doctor replied.

‘Doctor, what are you expecting to find in the mines?’ Romana wanted to know.

‘If we find what I think we’re going to find,’ said the Doctor grimly as he banked the aircar into a steep descent, ‘then I’m afraid I can hardly bear to contemplate it.’

The Doctor landed the aircar near the mine workings Kimus had pointed out on their earlier trip. The trio began walking towards the ramshackle sheds and buildings. The

land-scape was grey and orange and lifeless, a sea of mine tailings, slag heaps and rusting metal.

‘This way,’ said Kimus, guiding the two Time Lords. ‘All this is from the old mining days before the interior of the mines were fully automated. I played here once as a child.

There is an ancient lift shaft that comes to the surface here for any emergency inspections of the shaft interior.’

The trio picked their way over the unforgiving wasteland and entered the neglected main building.

‘The lift shaft is over here, but nobody’s used it in living memory,’ said the young man.

‘Why not?’ asked Romana.

‘The penalty is death.’

‘I can see there wouldn’t be much incentive then,’ the Doctor quipped. The trio stopped at a wire cage, suspended on cables that ran up through the high ceiling.

The Doctor opened the cage and had a look at the controls. ‘You know, I think that’ll work. Let’s see, shall we?’

All three stepped gingerly into the mesh cage. ‘Right! Now hold on very tight!’ the Doctor cautioned, and activated the lift. It began to descend - surprisingly smoothly for something not used in living memory, thought Romana.

Back on the Bridge, the Captain was again tearing strips off his subordinates.

‘Escaped! Escaped! Your incompetence beggars the imagination! Teeth of the Devil, there will be blood for this - there will be blood! Every guard in the city must be mobilised instantly! If they are not found within fifteen minutes, then by fury, one in ten of you shall die! Find them! Find them! Bring them back alive if possible, but find them!’ The Captain dismissed the gathering of guards and Fibuli approached him.

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‘Captain, they’re in the old mine shaft!’

‘The mine shaft,’ murmured the Captain.

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. ‘Die, you fool...’

The Captain shook his head to clear the vision and then realised the significance of his deputy's comments. 'Moons of madness!' He leapt up from the com. 'Mr Fibuli -'

'Yes, sir.'

'We must find a way of breaking into their vessel without their help. Once they have seen what lies at the bottom of the mineshaft, they must never leave alive! Never! Guards!

The intruders in the mineshaft must be obliterated!'

'But why is it light down here?' asked Kimus.

'Natural phosphorescence,' replied Romana and the Doctor automatically. The trio was walking along a huge corridor, hollowed out of stone walls far below the surface of Zanak. The Doctor was supplementing the natural light source with a small but powerful torch he'd dug out of his pockets. The sound of running and dripping water was constantly echoing about with the noises of their voices and footfalls.

'Where are we, Doctor?' queried Romana.

'About three miles beneath the surface of Zanak, I'd say.'

'Three miles!' exclaimed Romana. 'But it's so cold!'

'Yes, and wet. And icy... ahh!' the Doctor paused, tapping his torch against his temples. 'Of course! Romana - this entire planet's hollow!'

'Hollow?'

'Yes, hollow, hollow! Can't you work it out? Go on, take a look, go on, look, look!'

he urged, handing her the torch. The Doctor turned to Kimus. 'You all right?'

The young man just shivered. 'It's all beyond me, Doctor,' he admitted. 'I don't know where I am.'

'It's frozen ground,' Romana called out, crouching to touch the floor. 'I don't understand - cold, wet...'

'Come here and listen,' said the Doctor. 'Now listen, Kimus - the reason the stars in your sky change is because they don't.'

'They don't?'

'No - your entire planet jumps through space.'

'Those engines!' Romana gasped. Everything fell into place for her - and she had thought just the mountain moved.

‘Yes, those engines. Huge enough to dematerialise an entire, hollow planet, flip it halfway across the galaxy and rematerialise it around its chosen prey.’

‘You mean other planets,’ prompted his excited companion.

‘Yes - like a huge fist,’ said the Doctor, closing his fist over the top of the torch, blotting out all light from it. ‘This world is one huge mining machine. It mines planets, extracts all the valuable minerals and leaves all the rubble behind.’

‘Then what we’re standing on now...’

‘Is the planet we originally came looking for -’

‘Calufrax!’ the pair finished in unison.

‘Buried inside Zanak?’ asked Romana.

‘Buried inside Zanak - the pirate planet,’ said the Doctor darkly, ‘and having the goodness sucked out of it!’

Kimus had not really grasped the finer details of what was said - he was having trouble just trying to keep up. But mention of his own world focused the debate for him. ‘What?’

Do you mean that whole other worlds have died - just to make us rich? Whole other 44

worlds - like ours?’ he asked, horrified.

The Doctor nodded. ‘Whole other worlds.’

‘Some of them inhabited,’ added Romana.

Kimus felt ill. His chest was a yawning chasm, a void with the cold, awful winds of reality ripping through it and tearing at his insides like the talons of a thousand demons.

He wandered away a few steps and fell to his knees, overwhelmed with guilt and shame and grief and anger.

The Doctor was digging about in his pockets and then held up a gleaming green gem.

‘The Oolion stone I picked up in the street - Bandraginus V!’ he cried out in sudden realisation. ‘I knew I’d heard that name somewhere before - I remember now. About a hundred years ago, it disappeared without trace - a planet of a thousand million souls - Captain fod-der!’ He dropped the priceless gem as if it were actually dripping with the blood of all those murdered by this hideous crime.

The gemstone rolled across the ground and stopped near Kimus. The young man looked at it for a moment, then took the Oolion in his hands and held it up to what

light there was about. 'Bandraginus V - by every last breath in my body – you'll be avenged!'

he pledged fervently, a privately sworn oath making the gem his touch-stone for action.

Romana had extracted the Tracer from her belt and activated it. 'Doctor, the Tracer - it's gone mad. The second segment must be down here somewhere,' she said, looking around hopefully. Since the segment could be disguised as any object, living or inanimate, she was also looking in vain.

The Doctor reached out and deactivated the Tracer. 'Yes, I thought so.'

Kimus stood and turned to see a quintet of guards running towards them. 'Doctor!'

'There they are!' shouted the lead guard, and began firing at them. 'Kill them! Kill them!' The other guards followed his lead.

The fugitives ran for their lives, pursued closely by the guards. Kimus paused for a moment to fire back at the hunters, downing one of them. Then he ran on, trying to catch up with the Doctor and Romana.

Suddenly the Doctor stopped. Such was the haste of their flight that Romana and Kimus almost knocked him over trying to stop in time. Then they saw what had caused the Doctor to halt.

In front of them stood the Mentiads, blocking any chance of escape. The closest zombie stepped forward, swept back his shroud and spoke. 'Doctor - we have come for you!'

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7

The Gestalt

A figure stepped forward from among the Mentiads and stood by the leader. Kimus gasped as the zombie pulled back his shroud to reveal a pallid face with the distinctive red, shrunken eyes.

'Pralix! Pralix - what have they done to you?'

His questions were interrupted as an energy bolt just missed him, fired by the approaching guards. 'Kill them! Kill them all!' ordered the lead guard as they advanced.

The Mentiads raised their arms in unison and an invisible force wall formed just in front of the guards, blocking their attack.

'We must hurry - the force wall will not last long,' Pralix told the fugitives.

He turned and the Mentiads began filing away.

'They're on our side!' said Romana.

'I thought as much,' said the Doctor nonchalantly, and set off after the Mentiads.

'But I don't understand,' mumbled Kimus.

'The Mentiads are treated as devils, but when they attacked me a few hours ago...' the Doctor began to explain.

'They attacked you?' Romana asked. 'I thought you said...'

'They thought I was trying to harm Pralix. But they didn't kill me. I could tell by the vibrations they hit me with they weren't evil. Frightened, confused, yes. But not evil. They weren't kidnapping Pralix - they were rescuing him.'

'Hurry!' Pralix urged.

'But why are they?' Romana wanted to know.

'I don't know,' the Doctor confessed. 'Exciting, isn't it?'

Romana and Kimus ran to catch up with him. 'I'll explain as we go,' he added.

'Go where?'

'To see Mula, of course!'

Mula was about to drop in her tracks. She and K9 seemed to have been travelling for forever. They had traversed many hills and finally reached the eastern end of the mountain range. The pair then followed a bewildering series of tunnels into the mountainside, heading northwards, Mula thought. She would have long ago been lost, were it not for K9's unerring tracking of the Mentiads' psycho-spore.

The mobile computer stopped abruptly and Mula realised they had reached the end of a corridor and before them stood a small doorway.

'This is where the Mentiads' psycho-spore ends,' stated K9.

‘You mean they live here? The Mentiads?’ asked Mula.

‘Affirmative.’

Mula stepped forward and pushed the door - it opened freely. Inside was stark and empty, except for a few stone benches. Summoning all her courage, the young woman en-46

tered the chamber, followed by K9. A quick search proved the room’s emptiness, so she sat down by her robot guide.

‘Master,’ said K9 suddenly.

‘What is it?’

‘The Mentiads have located the Doctor-master. They are approaching.’

‘How can you tell?’ Mula wanted to know. ‘I didn’t hear anything.’

‘The Doctor-master has very distinctive heartbeats,’ K9 explained. ‘Estimated time of arrival 21.9 seconds.’

‘I still can’t get over the Mentiads. All my life I’ve been taught to hate and loathe them. Now it seems they’re the only honest men on this stinking planet’

‘Arrival in sixteen seconds now.’ K9 was almost petulant. ‘The Doctor would not have instructed me to conduct you to them if he had not thought it safe. Twelve seconds.’

‘But how could he possibly know?’

‘My subsequent analysis of their brain-wave patterns indicated no malice when they attacked him.’

‘You mean they slammed him to the wall with good vibrations?’

‘Affirmative. Arrival imminent.’

Maybe it was time for some unlearning, Mula thought to herself.

In a strange procession making its way slowly through the heart of the mountains towards the Mentiads’ dwelling chamber, Kimus too was struggling to grasp the same concept.

‘So when you got thrown against the wall at Balaton’s, the Mentiads did not mean to harm you?’

‘Exactly. They used benign force so they could rescue your friend Pralix before more of the Captain’s guards turned up to execute him.’

‘But I thought the Mentiads were evil zombies with -’

‘Terrible powers, yes, yes, I know,’ replied the Time Lord. ‘Not everything is always as it seems. That’s very important.’

Oh, thought Kimus - he could see there was much that he still had to understand of his world. ‘But what’s happened to Pralix?’ he asked, looking ahead at his best friend, who was leading the procession of Mentiads and fugitives.

‘He has become one of the Mentiads,’ explained Romana, who had been studying them during the long trek. ‘They’re telepathic, you see.’

‘Telewhatic?’

‘Telepathic - they talk to each other through their minds and some can move objects just by thinking about it.’

‘That’s amazing - but has Pralix become evil like the others?’

‘Just because someone is different from you, doesn’t mean they’re evil or dangerous,’

scolded the Doctor. ‘You’ve been taught to believe a lie about the Mentiads because it suited the Captain’s regime. The Mentiads, they’re a force for good and perhaps the only thing that can save your planet from those who rule it. You’re going to have to open your mind, your way of thinking Kimus, if you’re going to be any help to them in that struggle.’

‘I’m trying to, Doctor, I really am,’ replied the young man. ‘But it’s all a bit overwhelming finding out just about everything you’ve ever been taught or told was a lie, suddenly.’

Romana felt sympathy for Kimus. Even she had trouble keeping up with the Doctor sometimes, though she would never admit that aloud. ‘Don’t worry - there’s probably much more of the same to come,’ she said with a friendly smile.

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The guard was terrified as he entered the Bridge to give the Captain the bad news.

‘Captain, Captain, sir. We were attacked in the mines.’ He paused and swallowed heavily.

‘The Doctor has escaped with the Mentiads.’

The Captain roared. ‘With the Mentiads!’ He raised his arm, and Avitron swooped on its latest prey. The guard died with a scream and the Captain walked away from

the charred corpse. 'Incompetent fools,' he uttered dismissively. Then reality ripped away.

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die, you fool, die!' she...

The Captain nearly bent double, the pain of the vision far worse this time. Was he going mad, he wondered, before his computer persona pushed aside such foolish notions as premonitions and began calculating its next move. The Captain beckoned his deputy and addressed Fibuli in a quiet, almost conversational tone. 'By the blood of the Sky Demon, we have been queasy fools. We should have obliterated the Mentiads years ago and rid ourselves of their sickly power.'

'But Captain, we have tried many times in the past.'

'And failed, Mr Fibuli. And failed.'

'Captain, sir, you said yourself it was a question of priorities...'

The Captain disliked anything remotely approaching criticism. 'I said! You dare to lay the rotting fruits of your own incompetence at my door?'

Fibuli simpered ingratiatingly. 'Captain, in your wisdom, you observed that whilst the Mentiads lay dormant - with no leader and no purpose - we were well enough protected and they performed a useful function as a focus for the fear and aggression for the people, and that very hatred, which you have so ingeniously channeled has contained them. The stalemate was in our favour...'

Fibuli was right and the Captain knew it. The zombies were a product of his own murderous activities. But he truly feared their power now the off-worlder had combined his might with their abilities. The Doctor might be able to galvanise the band of misfits and outcasts into a formidable threat - the Captain did not intend to allow the Doctor that chance. 'And now they will not be leaderless. Now they will have a clear purpose.'

'But sir, the means to destroy them is at last within our grasp. The planet Calufrax is rich in Voolium and Madranite 1-5. That's what we came here for,' said the deputy.

'Voolium and Madranite 1-5, that is true, that is true,' mused the Captain.

'The vibrations of the refined crystals can be harnessed to produce interference patterns which will neutralise their mental powers...'

'And leave them defenceless - as weak as ordinary men - obliterable!' The Captain paused to calm himself. 'Excellent, Mr Fibuli, excellent - your death shall be delayed.'

The deputy's head sagged at the last statement, after being unaware his life was so immediately at stake. The Captain was becoming more unstable by the moment, thought Fibuli. But he said, 'Oh, thank you. Again and again, sir, your goodness confounds me.'

The Captain waved aside these mouthings. 'But by the ninety-three names of the demigod of night, how soon, Mr Fibuli, how soon can you be prepared?'

'Ah, that's difficult sir...'

'Difficult! The gnarled finger of the Sky Demon beckons you Mr Fibuli...!'

'Ahh, err, well, if we put all the automated mining and processing equipment on the planet on to full power, sir, we could reduce the entire planet of Calufrax within, er, hours.

Of course, the machinery would be dangerously overloaded and the...'

'That matters not a quark, Mr Fibuli,' cut in the Captain. 'Speed is of the essence. The Mentiads will be moving even now. Do it this instant or this time there will be no escape.'

'But - '

'Hurry, I say!' The deranged giant smiled to himself as Fibuli scurried away - soon 48

both threats to himself on Zanak would be eliminated...

Mula knew her brother would never harm her, but she still had mixed feelings when he arrived with the three fugitives and the other Mentiads.

The Doctor rushed over and crouched down beside his robot dog. 'Hello, K9. Surprised to see us?'

'Amazed, Master,' K9 replied.

'There you are,' the Doctor said, grinning up at Romana. 'Didn't I say he'd be amazed?'

To make the situation easier for all, the telepaths agreed to speak verbally as they had done back in the mine shaft. The Mentiad leader, Kintha, talked first about how he had become the first of his kind just after the Captain announced the first golden age of prosperity, long before. The powers manifested while Kintha had been in terrible pain and he had lashed out telepathically, killing one of the Captain's guards. After that he became an outcast as the lies were spread that he was evil. When other Mentiads began appearing, they banded together, living away from the main settlements.

'Very clever,' said the Doctor. 'The Captain isolated the only people with any real power against him and then turned the other citizens against them too.'

'You say that like you almost admire him, Doctor,' said a concerned Mula.

‘Not really - I admire his tactical skills, but abhor his methods and actions.’ Kintha brought the debate back to its true focus. ‘Doctor - do you bring us the understanding we seek? For generation upon generation, our planet has been assailed by a nameless evil. We would know its name.’

‘Its name’s the Captain. You know that. Why haven’t you ever got off your bottoms and kicked him out?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Because his evil is beyond our comprehension, strange images haunt our brains,’ explained Kintha. ‘Hideous death agonies wrack our bodies, weird powers of the mind descend upon us and yet we know nothing. And yet - when a new Mentiad presence appears amongst the people, we know we must find them and protect them. Beyond that all is dark and confusion, images and pain.’

‘They found me just in time,’ added Pralix, with a reassuring smile to his sister and best friend. ‘But for the other Mentiads, I would have been killed. They were too late for my father before me. He was shot down in the street like a dog.’

‘With each new Mentiad we’ve grown stronger, but still the understanding evades us.

We are constricted by the peoples’ hatred,’ said Kintha.

‘A gestalt! A telepathic gestalt!’ cried out the Doctor, like a certain ancient Greek announcing his bath was too hot.

‘A geswhat?’ Kimus asked.

‘A telepathic gestalt,’ the Doctor replied. ‘A community of the mind.’

‘Many minds combined together telepathically to form a single entity, more powerful than the sum of the parts,’ added K9 helpfully. ‘The concept of a gestalt was first developed by a group of German philosophers on the planet Terra in the star system Sol during its early twentieth century and -’

The Doctor cut K9 short. ‘Yes, yes, yes, that’s enough of the history lesson.’

‘And Pralix is part of that?’ asked Mula.

‘I am of Us,’ said Pralix. ‘All that We know, I know.’

‘Yes,’ agreed the Doctor.

Romana was a little more helpful. ‘The power of a gestalt is enormous.’

Pralix stepped forward. ‘Can you help us, Doctor? We are powerless unless we under-

stand. Can you tell us what is happening to Zanak?’

‘Yes. Zanak’s just a shell of a planet. Completely hollow.’

‘Hollow?’ Kintha repeated.

‘Yes, but very, very empty,’ the Doctor explained. ‘Now listen, there are vast transmat engines hidden under the Captain’s mountain.’

‘Yes, they make the entire planet suddenly drop out of the space dimension,’ Romana added. ‘Vanish.’

‘Vanish? Is that possible?’ Mula found this very difficult to comprehend.

‘Yes, but you don’t notice that, you see, because you’re part of it,’ the Doctor told her.

‘Now listen, at almost the same moment it vanishes it rematerialises in another part of the galaxy around another, slightly smaller planet.’

‘In this case a planet called Calufrax,’ said Romana.

‘Yes. So your planet -’

‘Zanak,’ supplied Romana.

The Doctor gave her a look. ‘Am I telling this story or are you?’

‘Just helping you along, Doctor,’ she said sweetly.

‘Romana, would you like to mentally revise your seven hundred and ninety eight times table?’ the Doctor suggested.

‘All right.’

‘So your planet ...’ the Doctor began again.

‘Finished,’ said Romana.

‘Good, now be quiet. So your planet -’

‘Zanak,’ Romana repeated.

‘Yes, having materialised around the other planet, smothers it, crushes it and mines all the mineral wealth out of it.’

‘Just like an enormous leech,’ observed Mula.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘And that’s when the lights change,’ explained Kimus.

‘The Omens,’ gasped Mula, finally understanding.

‘Yes, said the Doctor darkly. ‘The Omens mean the death of another planet.’

Kintha pulled aside a curtain, revealing a design on the wall, a circle inside another larger circle. ‘This is the explanation of the image that haunts us,’ he explained. ‘The image of the concentric circles ...’

‘The image of the Pirate Planet,’ the Doctor observed.

‘Then the truth is known.’ Kintha replied.

‘Yes,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘So what are we going to do about it?’

‘The Time of Knowing is come upon us,’ Kintha declared. ‘The Evil is named unto us.

There shall be no more waiting. We go to destroy the Captain. Come, Doctor, come, brothers.’

‘Wait,’ said the Doctor. ‘There’s no point being in too much of a rush, there’s something more I want to know about the Captain first.’

‘Speak,’ said Kintha.

‘Who exactly is he?’ the Doctor asked. ‘Where did he come from? Not from Zanak I’ll be bound. Do you happen to know?’

‘Does that matter, Doctor?’ Romana queried.

‘Of course it matters!’ the Doctor replied. ‘If you’re deliberately setting out to destroy somebody it’s only decent to know a bit about them. Anyway, he may provide the answer to where the second segment is. Had you forgotten what we came for?’

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Enak stood by Balaton’s body, recounting what he saw to Zanak’s council of elders. ‘I saw him shot down by the Captain’s guards while he was begging for mercy.’

The leader, Radune, the oldest and most respected among them, spoke. ‘I find this hard to believe, but I also do not think you would create such a story, Enak. Perhaps you simply misinterpreted events. We must gather to consider what this could mean and then will approach the leader of the Captain’s guard for an explanation.’ The other elders agreed - haste was not their habit.

Enak was unimpressed. ‘One of your number has been murdered and all you can do is talk about it!’ He stormed from the dwelling, disgusted.

The first rumblings of revolution had started on Zanak.

The Uprising

The off-worlders were being told about Zanak's long history.

'So Zanak was a happy, prosperous planet?' summed up the Doctor.

'Yes, until the reign of Queen Xanxia,' said Pralix.

'Yes, may her spirit be accursed,' spat out Kintha vehemently.

'She had some kind of evil powers – the legends say she lived for hundreds of years,' said Pralix.

'Come on, that's not necessarily evil,' objected the Doctor. 'I've known hundreds of people who've lived for hundreds...'

'Shh! Doctor!' Romana told him.

'What?'

'Please carry on,' Romana said to Pralix.

K9 whirred into life as his sensors detected something significant. 'Master.'

'Shh, K9, shh,' said the Doctor, and turned back to Pralix. 'Please carry on.'

Pralix continued, 'Queen Xanxia staged galactic wars to demonstrate her powers. By the time she'd finished, Zanak was a ruin. When the Captain arrived, there was hardly anyone left.'

'Just a few, miserable nomadic tribes,' added Kintha.

'Tell me – how did he arrive?' the Doctor asked.

Mula took up the narrative. 'My grandfather speaks of seeing a giant silver ship falling from the sky one night with a mighty crash like thunder. Craft often fell to the ground about this time, he says.'

'The Captain was one of the few survivors,' said Kintha.

‘Hmm. And needed pretty extensive surgery by the look of him,’ said the Doctor. ‘I wonder who did that, hmm?’

‘I don’t think anyone knows,’ said Pralix.

K9 tried again to get his master’s attention. ‘Master.’

‘Not now, K9, not now. Shh! Go on, Kintha.’

‘The Captain took charge of Zanak. He persuaded the people to work for him, creating the mines and building strange machinery. The best of our scholars were taken to become technicians and helped create the Bridge, while the strongest men became guards. Then the golden ages of prosperity began.’

‘They were stupid fools to listen to his promises. Golden Ages of Prosperity! Pampered slavery, more like,’ interjected Kimus bitterly. Mula silenced him with an elbow to the ribs.

‘Maybe, but you wouldn’t have done any different,’ Pralix pointed out. ‘Particularly when the wealth started to flow. Everyone was deliriously happy.’

‘Not everyone,’ Kintha reminded him.

‘No,’ Pralix agreed.

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‘For some of us, terrible agonies of the mind began,’ Kintha said.

‘Yes, well they would for someone who’s telepathic,’ agreed the Doctor.

‘Why, Doctor, do you know?’ asked Pralix, eager to learn about his new condition.

‘Yes, yes, I do,’ replied the Doctor. ‘You were absorbing what you would call the life force from the plundered planets.’

‘What is the life force?’ asked Pralix, mystified.

‘Well, it’s, err, it’s quite difficult to explain in simple terms, but basically... Romana?’

Romana smiled, happy to display her vast learning and show up the Doctor simultaneously. ‘Every atom of matter in the universe has a certain amount of energy locked inside it. Now with something the size of a planet, there’s an enormous quantity -’

‘Oh, enormous!’ chipped in the Doctor.

‘So every time Zanak crushes a planet, it releases all that energy. Now, some of it will be on psychic wavelengths.’

‘Right,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘So every time it happens there’s a fantastic blast of psychic energy, enough to smash open the neural pathways of anyone with telepathic abilities, like you Mentiads.’

The Doctor chimed in, ‘That’s right. You Mentiads were absorbing all that power into your brains.’

Kintha grasped the central element of the complex explanation. ‘So each planet as it dies, adds to that power – the power by which it will be avenged!’

K9 finally managed to get a word in edgeways. ‘Master!’

‘What is it K9?’ the Doctor inquired

‘My seismograph detects enormous increase in mining operations around the planet.

Every mining machine is now working at full pressure.’

Kimus was agog. ‘But that’s madness - the machines simply aren’t capable of maintaining that level of operation. It would empty the mines by tomorrow!’

Romana raised an interesting inference from the new development. ‘It seems the Captain is in a rush to finish operations on Calufrax and jump again.’

‘But why?’ asked the Doctor rhetorically. ‘Why this sudden rush? And which world will be the next victim of the pirate planet? We need to do some planning...’

Fibuli hurried up to the Captain. ‘All the plant is now working at maximum capacity, sir.

We will soon have the Voolium and Madranite 1-5 crystals,’ he reported.

‘Excellent, excellent,’ replied the Captain. ‘Mr Fibuli...’

‘Sir?’

‘I shall prepare the apparatus myself. Fetch me the equipment.’

Fibuli scurried away, and soon returned laden with circuitry and electronic devices. He stacked the materials in a pile on the console in front of the Captain.

The Captain immediately got to work, building the complex psychic interference transmitter with clearly demonstrated great skill and knowledge. ‘Alpha suppression signal triggering 338.79 microbits. Neuro-wipedown circuit operational, lobal derangeamatic feedback, parallel with the corticold simulacron. Excellent. By the left frontal lobe of the Sky Demon, Mr Fibuli, I used to be one of the greatest hyper-engineers of my time.’

‘Of all time, Captain,’ offered the deputy. ‘Your reconstruction of this planet is proof of that.’

‘A makeshift job Mr Fibuli, the best that could be done with what was to hand. Oh, it’s not scale that counts, but skill. Now - the ship from which most of the major components for this structure were salvaged - the Vantarialis - now there was a ship! The greatest raid-ing cruiser ever built, and I built it, Mr Fibuli! I built it with technology so far advanced 53

you would not be able to distinguish it from magic.’

‘I heard my great-grandfather speak of it with awe in his voice and tears in his eyes.’

‘Your great-grandfather was a fine first mate on the Vantarialis, daring, loyal and vicious...’

‘And proud to be, Captain, as I am proud to be first mate on this planet.’ The deputy pressed his point. ‘All the same, sir, this must be one of the great engineering feats of all time - a hollow, space-jumping planet...’

The Captain became enraged at Fibuli’s superficial ego stroking. ‘This planet! This vile, lumbering planet! You presume to compare this ugly lump of blighted rock with the greatest, sleekest, most deadly ship that ever dared the star ways!’

‘Well it doesn’t have the performance sir, but...’

‘Devil storms, Mr Fibuli, you are a callow fool.’ His remarks about Zanak could just as easily have been about himself, and subconsciously, the Captain knew they really were.

He began striding about the Bridge, waving his both his human and android arms about and punching them into the air at vital points in his self-pitying rhetoric. ‘Do you not see how my heart burns for the dangerous liberty of the skies? Plunder, battle and escape!’ His voice dropped from a shout to a sob. ‘My soul is imprisoned, bound to this ugly lump of blighted rock, beset by zombie Mentiads and interfering Doctors.’

‘But what can they do to you, Captain?’

‘Enough! They shall die - by the flaming moons of Hell, they shall die.’ Logic overtook emotion again. ‘Find me those crystals, Mr Fibuli,’ he hissed.

‘Aye, aye, Captain. As soon as we can, sir.’ The deputy scampered off to see how the mineral rape of Calufrax was proceeding.

‘I shall be avenged,’ the Captain muttered to himself.

A voice light of tone but heavy with sarcasm and menace filled the Bridge. ‘Oh good, I see you’ve found some occupational therapy. It’s a good thing not to let your old skills die.’

The Captain turned and saw -

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die, you fool, die!' she screamed and...

- his tormentor had returned to the Bridge, mocking him again. He looked straight into the blinding face. 'I assure you, my old skills are very much alive,' he said cryptically.

Kimus and the Doctor walked back into Zanak's main settlement after the long trek from the Mentiads' dwelling in the mountains. After considerable debate it was decided that they would try to 'borrow' another aircar and use it to gain direct access to the Bridge structure. Then their task would be to somehow disable the engines overnight to stop further space jumps before tackling the Captain himself. Meanwhile, Romana, Mula and the Mentiads would wait overnight and then set out for the Bridge cross-country, starting out in the dim, early light. It had been suggested that they could retrace their steps through the mountain tunnels and then up the lift shaft, but investigation showed the tunnels around the mine shaft swarming with soldiers. The journey by foot would be difficult and with light fading fast, the assault on the Bridge was safer left to the morning.

Once in the settlement, Kimus insisted on going to Balaton's dwelling to try and persuade the old man of the danger he faced from the Captain. Just as they approached the house, Enak accosted them.

'Kimus - thank goodness I've found you! Do you know where Mula is? Her grandfather was murdered by the Captain's guards; I saw it myself!'

'Balaton - murdered?' said the young man disbelievingly - how would he tell Mula?

'Yes, it's true. The council debated for a long time before deciding what to do. The 54

members have just requested a meeting with the leader of the Captain's guards mid-morrow - it's being held in the central courtyard,' said Enak.

'Good, it could prove a useful diversion,' decided the Doctor. 'Come on, Kimus, we've got work to do!'

'All right. Now, Enak, be very careful at the meeting - the guards are utterly ruthless and not to be trusted. Take care,' said Kimus before hurrying off after the off-worlder.

The two fugitives returned to the courtyard where they had 'borrowed' the first aircar.

Again, the same guard was dozing in the pilot's seat of an aircar.

'Well they say you can confuse some of the people all of the time - let's see shall we?'

The Doctor repeated his trick with the trail of sweets, and the guard obediently climbed out of the craft to follow the confectionery distraction.

The Doctor and Kimus climbed into the aircar. 'I really must stop doing this. It's like shooting fish in a barrel.'

Just as the Doctor was about to start the aircar, a blast of concentrated energy fused the aircar's controls. The guard was not about to be fooled twice with the same trick.

'Hold it! Hands up! Get out!' he yelled.

'Oh well, old Abe' was right - you can't fool all of the people all of the time,' muttered the Doctor to himself.

Fibuli scampered excitedly onto the Bridge. 'Captain, sir, Captain – they've caught the Doctor!'

'Splendid, Mr Fibuli.'

'He was trying to steal an aircar but one of our guards managed to immobilise it.

We've sent another aircar to pick them up. Which means in the end -'

'Trivia, Mr Fibuli, trivia,' said the Captain, cutting short the babble. 'Have the guards managed to open his vessel yet?'

The deputy's face fell. 'Ah, no, sir, it's proving remarkably difficult. Nothing they can do will even mark it.'

'Fools, incompetent cretins,' said the Captain wearily.

'But we have located a potential source for PJX 1-8.'

'Ahh - better, Mr Fibuli.'

The deputy smiled again. 'We can manage one more jump under our present conditions, sir. If we made it to that planet, we could mine it for PJX 1-8 and then make our own repairs.'

'And we will mine it,' bustled the half-man, half-robot. He was thinking only of getting another step closer to freedom and abandoning this charade of bluster and bombast.

'Prepare to jump as soon as the Voolium and Madranite 1-5 crystals have been produced.'

'I feel I should point out, Captain, that it is a heavily-populated planet.'

'Remind me to catch up on my weeping one day.'

'In other words, go ahead, sir?'

‘Show me the chart,’ was the grunted reply.

Fibuli unfurled a ready star chart, which the Captain peered at over his shoulder. ‘It’s here, sir, in the planetary system of the star Sol - the planet Terra.’

The Captain was almost wistful for a moment. ‘Ahh, yes, a pretty planet.’

‘It looks a pleasant world, Captain.’

‘Then...’

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. ‘Die, you fool, die!’ she screamed and brought her...

‘... It will be a pleasure to destroy it!’ raged the Captain, shaking his head furiously.

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‘Yes sir,’ said Fibuli hastily. ‘I will make arrangements.’ He hurried off.

The Captain felt a chill in his sensors - or was it his bones? Sometimes he could still remember the cold winds of Zanak tearing at his charred flesh that night the Vantariasis fell from the sky. He could still feel the pain, the numbness, the loss - his humanity died that night, along with his soul. Only hollowness remained now, matching the hollowness of this world he piloted across the cosmos in search of prey...

The wild white silhouette whispered to him, ‘Another planet, Captain?’

‘Another planet,’ he echoed.

‘Then the objective will soon be reached.’

‘It will... it will indeed.’

It was early, and the light was still dim in the settlement when Romana and K9 arrived.

Taking the mobile computer cross-country and up the treacherous mountain path to the Bridge had proved impossible, so it was decided that Romana would go down to the settlement and put K9 into an aircar. She found one abandoned by the settlement’s edge, its controls fused by blaster fire. Unbeknownst to Romana, this was the same car that the Doctor and Kimus had tried to ‘borrow’ the previous evening.

‘I can repair the controls and pilot this craft to the Bridge successfully,’ K9 informed Romana.

‘All right, but if anything happens, go back to the TARDIS,’ she agreed. ‘I’m heading back to Mula and the Mentiads.’ Romana set off for the mountains again, wondering how the Doctor and Kimus were getting on.

The Captain was almost happy. The mining of Calufrax was virtually complete. Soon the crystals would be in his grasp, giving him power over the zombie Mentiads. And the off-worlder Doctor and one of his native accomplices had been captured and brought to the Bridge. Both were chained to a column in the control chamber, slumped forward unconscious. Slowly, the Doctor began to come to his senses.

‘Have I told you my plan, hmm? No more Janis thorns, no more Janis thorns! I think it should work really quite well...’ babbled the Time Lord. Suddenly he jerked awake and found the Captain staring at him intently. ‘Oh, well. Back to spontaneous improvisation.

Good morning.’

‘So, Doctor, you have discovered the little secret of our planet.’

‘You won’t get away with it, you know.’

The Captain almost laughed out loud. ‘And what makes you so certain of that?’

‘At the moment, nothing at all,’ replied the Doctor with disarming honesty, ‘but it does my morale no end of good just to say it. I’ve been tied to pillars by better men than you, Captain.’

‘Aah - but none, I dare guess, more vicious!’

‘Vicious? Ha!’ The Doctor looked about and then whispered to the still-unconscious Kimus. ‘Don’t panic, Kimus, don’t panic!’

‘I have programmed the Bridge computer to devise a suitable manner for you to leave us, and believe me Doctor, my computer has a wicked imagination. By the horny elbows of the Sky Demon I shall enjoy your death.’

‘The Sky Demon!’ exclaimed the Doctor. ‘I’ve got it! The pirate fleets of Agran! They used to terrorise and plunder the whole western sector of this Galaxy. The Sky Demon was the mythical devil that the souls of dead pirates were supposed to go to. I thought you were all destroyed in the Dordellis Wars.’

‘Silence! By the skies of hell, silence! You know nothing of these things.’

‘Oh, I thought I was doing rather well,’ retorted the Doctor. ‘Something that’s been puzzling me, though, is how come you’re still with us? Without wishing to be rude of course - it’s all right for chaps like me. But a pirate? Two hundred years and more is over-staying your welcome, don’t you think? The gnarled fingers of the Sky Demon must be tapping a little impatient by now.’

‘Doctor, I see you do not care to wait and experience the death my computer is preparing for you, you wish to die now,’ growled the Captain. ‘So be it.’

The Nurse appeared at the Captain’s side. ‘Doctor,’ she observed haughtily, ‘I think you’re being a little tactless.’

‘I know,’ the Doctor grinned. ‘I’m terribly good at it, aren’t I?’

The Time Lord continued mocking his captor. ‘What are you doing it for, Captain? It doesn’t make sense, and you know it. I can understand the life of a full-blooded pirate - the thrill, the danger and the derring-do, but this?’

The half-man, half-robot began to pace the floor in frustration, like a caged animal.

His foe’s words were like daggers, stabbing the truth into his mind.

The Doctor continued his verbal attack. ‘Hidden away in your mountain retreat, eating other peoples’ perfectly good planets - where’s the derring-do in that?’

‘Silence!’

‘You’re just trying to shut me up. You can’t kill me while I’m helpless.’

‘Can’t I?’

‘No. You can’t. Because you’re a warrior and it’s against the warrior’s code. You should have thought of that before you tied me up.’

‘By the hounds of hell...’

The Doctor cut short the Captain’s hoarse whisper of impotent rage. ‘Aaah, yes. Hard to listen, isn’t it, Captain, when someone’s got a finger on a nerve?’ The Doctor tried another line of attack. ‘What is it you’re really up to, eh? What do you want? You don’t want to take over the universe, do you? No! You wouldn’t know what to do with it - beyond shout at it!’

The Captain could feel his blood boiling by this stage. He could hold back no longer - it was time for the Doctor to die. He raised his android arm to command Avitron to kill, but paused before transmitting the fatal signal. ‘Mr Fibuli!’ the Captain shouted.

Fibuli scuttled over to join the Captain. ‘Yes sir?’

‘No,’ he said quietly. ‘Mr Fibuli - release him.’

The deputy was shocked. 'But Captain...'

The Captain had already marched from the room.

'He said release me!' hissed the Doctor.

Fibuli reluctantly used a sonic remote control to deactivate the bonds restraining the Doctor's arms. The Time Lord rubbed his wrists vigorously to try and restore the circulation from both his hearts. Then he strode off after the Captain.

At the settlement's edge, K9 had managed to reroute some of the less charred circuits in the abandoned aircar and bypass the worst of the damage. Using the sensor probe from his snout, the mobile computer activated the craft. 'Contact!' K9 announced to no one in particular, and the aircar was airborne. 'We have lift-off. Engage full forward thrust... Course, three two zero...'

The robot dog piloted the aircar toward the Bridge, and landed the craft by the door into the mountain. 'Most satisfactory,' K9 reported smugly.

K9's self-satisfaction was short-lived, however. Arriving at the door into the mountainside, he discovered that it would not open for him. 'You are a very stupid door...

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Open... I order you to open...' K9 ordered. The door remained obstinately closed. K9 extended his eye probe to access the door controls.

Far below, Romana had rejoined Mula and the Mentiads and the group had just reached the base of the Captain's mountain.

'It's a long climb up there,' said Romana, looking up at the towering peak.

'Don't worry - we'll make it,' reassured Pralix.

'We have to,' added Mula. 'I hope Kimus and the Doctor managed to break into the engine room without getting caught.'

'We're in trouble if they haven't,' Pralix observed.

'The Doctor knows what he's doing,' Romana assured them, showing more confidence than she felt.

The group began the difficult climb.

The Trophy Room

The Doctor gaped. He stood in the centre of a slightly curved corridor. Set into the two walls at regular intervals were cylindrical glass display cases and suspended inside these were globes of varying size and texture. The Time Lord could see at least a dozen such globes from where he stood, each labelled with the name of a planet. The last two cases were empty and the penultimate one was labelled 'Calufrax'

'Doctor, you say I am a warrior, and so I am, a pirate warrior. But I would not want you to die, as die you shall, I promise you...' the Captain began.

'Thank you,' the Doctor replied.

'... Without first allowing you to comprehend the extent of my genius.'

'Ah, it's "I'm not just a pretty face" time, is it?'

'Silence or the Sky Demon plucks you where you stand! My trophies, Doctor' said the Captain proudly. 'Feast your eyes on them for they represent an achievement unparalleled in the universe.'

The renegade Gallifreyan went up to the nearest display case that had the label

'Bandraginus V' affixed to it. Inside was a globe of a dull gold lustre. The Doctor wandered despondently on to another display case. 'What are they - tombstones, mm? Memorials to all the worlds you've destroyed?'

'Not memorials - these are the entire remains of the worlds themselves.' The Captain stood very still and recited the names of the planets silently to himself like a death list -

Bandraginus V, Granados, Lowiteliom, Aterica, Temesis, Tridento III, Bibicorpus - there had been so many. And soon Calufrax would join them here...

The Doctor hadn't paid attention to the Captain's last comment and continued to rant indignantly. 'You come in here to gloat on the trail of wanton destruction you're wreaked across the universe.'

'I come in here to dream of freedom,' was the wistful reply.

The Time Lord stopped abruptly as the Captain's earlier words sunk in at last. 'Did you just say these are the entire remains of the worlds themselves?' he asked, his voice awash with disbelief.

'Yes, Doctor.' The Captain pointed at the individual globes to illustrate his words.

'Each of these small spheres is the crushed remains of a planet, millions upon millions of tonnes of compressed rock held suspended here by forces beyond the limits of the imagination, forces that I have generated and harnessed.'

The Doctor took a few stumbling steps, his body and mind reeling. 'That's impossible!

That amount of matter in so small a space would undergo instant gravitational collapse and form a black hole!'

'Precisely.'

'What? But Zanak would be dragged into a gravitational whirlpool!'

'And why hasn't it? Because the whole system is so perfectly aligned by the most
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quisite exercise in gravitational geometry that every system is balanced out within itself.

Which is why we can stand next to billions of tonnes of super-compressed matter and not even be aware of it. With each new planet I acquire, the forces are realigned but the system remains stable.'

The Doctor was aghast with admiration and horror in equal amounts. 'Then, it's the most brilliant piece of astrogravitational engineering I've ever seen. The concept is simply staggering - pointless, but staggering.'

'I'm gratified that you appreciate it.'

'Appreciate it... appreciate it! You commit mass destruction and murder on a scale that's almost inconceivable and you ask me to appreciate it? Just because you happen to have made a brilliantly-conceived toy out of the mummified remains of planets?'

The two were standing nose to nose, virtually screaming at each other. 'Devil storms Doctor... It is not a toy!'

'Then what's it for? Huh? What are you doing? What could possibly be worth all this?'

'By the raging fury of the Sky Demon, you ask too many questions! You have seen, you have heard, be satisfied and ask no more!' The Captain pulled back his robotic arm, ready to strike down this upstart off-worlder himself. Just before he could deliver the killing blow, Fibuli's voice crackled over the communications system.

‘Captain, sir, come quickly please! The Mentiads - they’re on their way.

The Captain lowered his arm and marched coolly past the Doctor. ‘Excellent, excellent,’ he said, and returned to the Bridge. ‘Guards!’ he yelled back.

The Doctor remained where he was, staring around at the Captain’s trophy room, until two large guards arrived in response to the Captain’s summons. Standing one each side of the Time Lord, they lifted the Doctor by his arms so that his feet were dangling clear of the floor and carried him away.

It was in this undignified fashion that the Doctor arrived back on the Bridge. ‘Would you like to put me down?’ the Doctor suggested mildly.

‘Put him down,’ the Captain ordered, and the guards obediently dropped him to the floor.

The Captain was already seated in the com. ‘We’re preparing to meet your friends, the Mentiads. The poor, misbegotten fools are going to attempt to storm the Bridge,’ he leered with an evil chuckle.

‘That should be fun,’ replied the Doctor. He noticed Kimus coming around at last and approached the bleary young man who was still chained to the column. ‘Kimus, are you all right?’

‘What?’

The Doctor appealed to the Captain. ‘For goodness sake let him down - he hasn’t done you any harm, Captain. Please?’

‘You do it,’ said the Captain. He held out the sonic beam key, then dropped it on the floor. When the off-worlder bent to pick it up, he slammed his reinforced jackboot down a hair’s width away from the Doctor’s outstretched hand.

The Doctor picked up the device and set about releasing Kimus.

The Captain turned to deliver his deputy a verbal blasting. ‘By the bursting suns of Banzar, Mr Fibuli, where are my crystals?’ The first lieutenant scuttled from the Bridge to collect the stones.

Kimus was rubbing his wrists vigorously and looking about himself in wonder. He had been unconscious when brought into the Bridge, and now marvelled at the level of tech-60

nology on display in the chamber. ‘Doctor - where are we?’

‘We’re on the Bridge.’

‘The Bridge?’ The young man caught sight of the strangest creature he had ever seen.

It was nearly a giant in height, half-man and half-metal. The face was normal on the right side, but at the nose it melted into metal. The monstrosity was alive with a dominant presence, and seemed to Kimus to be in charge. 'What's that?' he asked the Doctor.

'That's your beloved Captain. Don't make any noise, the Mentiads are on their way here, and he's got no power against their psychic strength.'

Kimus was very relieved. Their plan was almost succeeding. He noticed the Captain floating over a tall, box-like control unit. 'What's that machine?'

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder at it. 'Oh, it just looks like a psychic interference transmitter.'

'A what?'

'Well, it's a sort of machine for neutralising psychic pow -' The Doctor trailed to a halt as he realised the significance of the machine.

Behind him, the Captain had been monitoring their conversation, and now strode over to the pair. 'Wag your tongue well, Doctor. It is the only weapon you have left.'

Bravado in full bluster, the Doctor looked at the Captain. 'Nonsense, Captain, nonsense. To make that machine work, you'd need a collection of the most rare crystals.

'Yes?'

'Oh yes. Voolium...'

'Voolium,' agreed his foe happily.

'Madrinite 1-5...' continued the Doctor uneasily.

'1-5...'

'And as far as I know they occur naturally on only one planet, and that's, aah...'

Whilst the Doctor racked his brain for the answer, Fibuli entered the Bridge carrying a tray of glittering gemstones.

'Look, Captain, the crystals from -'

At this moment the Doctor and Mr Fibuli chimed in unison, 'Calufrax!'

The Captain cherished the look on this off-worlder's face as he realised the predicament of his pathetic revolution.

'My biorhythms must be at an all-time low,' the Doctor lamented.

‘Excellent, Mr Fibuli, excellent. You see, Doctor, your friends are doomed.’

‘They are,’ the Doctor agreed despondently.

‘And so are you - we need not delay your death any longer. By the curled fangs of the Sky Demon, how I have looked forward to this moment!’

The whole situation was too much for Kimus. He had trouble appreciating all the nuances of these statements, but phrases like ‘your friends are doomed’ were plain enough for him to understand very readily. It was time for action. He ran to the nearest wall and wrenched at a pipe until it came away in his hands. He swung round and began advancing on this metallic monstrosity all Zanak bowed down before. ‘You hideous murdering maniac!’ he screamed at the Captain.

The Doctor rushed over to restrain Kimus. ‘No, no, no. Don’t do it.’

The Captain looked down at Kimus and said casually, ‘Avitron - kill.’

The mechanical parrot rose from its perch, but before it could dive on its prey, K9

trundled through the Bridge entranceway and fired at Avitron. The pair of robotic pets began a duel of laser beams, dodging and weaving around the Bridge. Finally, K9 lured the parrot out through the door to the trophy room.

‘Come back, K9! Come back!’ the Doctor called. Seizing the opportunity whilst eve-
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ryone was distracted by the battle, the Doctor grabbed Kimus by the arm. ‘Come on!’ he hissed, and dragged Kimus through the trophy room door, slamming it shut behind them.

‘Stop them! Stop them!’ roared the Captain.

Kimus spun the wheel on the trophy room door, locking it tight. Pausing for breath, he looked around. ‘What is this place?’

‘Never mind about that,’ the Doctor replied urgently. ‘Let’s find another way out.’

The Doctor and Kimus ran along the curved corridor of the trophy room. They paused briefly as K9 and the Polyphase Avitron approached them, still firing laser bolts at each other.

‘Get back!’ the Doctor warned, and he and Kimus flattened themselves against the wall until the two warring robots had passed by. ‘Careful K9,’ the Doctor called out after his dog. ‘You upset that balance and you’ll turn us all into an instant black hole!’

The Doctor and Kimus continued to the end of the corridor, which ended in another door. ‘Locked?’ asked a dubious Kimus.

The Doctor tried the locking wheel. 'Yes.'

'Oh - we're trapped.'

'Never!' The Time Lord pulled his sonic screwdriver from a pocket and unlocked the door with it. The pair slipped through.

Inside was a large room so dim they could barely see the far wall. In the centre of the chamber was a circular dais of silver and gold and on it an ornate throne. Sitting on the throne was an old, old woman - her face so wrinkled Kimus could not even begin to guess at her age. A few wisps of grey hair hung from her wizened head, which hung under the weight of an extravagant tiara made of precious metals and gemstones, an Oolion stone as its centrepiece. Kimus touched the Oolion stone in his pocket and thought of the millions killed by the Captain.

The old crone was lit by two glowing columns of light and energy streaming down from above and through the floor. They crackled with power, as though holding enormous forces in check. The young man stepped forward to touch the inviting light and warmth of the columns, but the Doctor held him back. 'No, don't. I rather think these are time dams.'

'You've lost me Doctor.'

'Time Dams, a primitive device, but effective. They actually hold back the flow of time in the area between them. Within that field, time decelerates exponentially, meaning that whilst it is still technically advancing, the next moment is never in fact reached.'

'You mean they stop time?'

'Not completely. But they can slow it down, given enough energy.'

The Time Lord and Kimus circled the dais, studying it more closely. Looking at the old woman on the throne, the young citizen said, 'That's repulsive. What is it?'

'That's your beloved Queen Xanxia.'

'What?! No, no - Xanxia's dead!'

'Oh, no, not yet, she isn't. She's suspended in the last few seconds of life.'

'You mean she can hear me? But I just called...'

'No, she can't.'

Kimus considered the situation anew, faced with a legendary tyrant, albeit one a little worse for the passing of time. 'Does she - does she know we're here?'

‘No, not while she’s between those two time dams there,’ replied the Doctor. ‘It’s really a form of suspended animation, but with two important differences. Do you want to know what they are?’

‘Am I likely to understand?’

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‘No, but I’ll tell you anyway. The first is that neural currents can still be directed round the cerebral cortex artificially...’

‘What?’

‘In other words she can still think. And the other difference...’

‘Yes?’

‘Is that it uses astronomical quantities of energy.’ The Doctor set about opening a panel in the far wall. He stopped and thought for a moment. ‘You know, to find enough energy to keep feeding those things, you’d need to ransack entire planets.’

Kimus began to realise that keeping the people of Zanak happy with wealth was not the real purpose of the planet’s piracy. ‘So whole other worlds have been destroyed with the sole purpose of keeping that alive?’ he asked, pointing at Xanxia. ‘All the wealth and prosperity was just a lucky side-effect for the citizens of Zanak?’

‘Yes. There must be something more to it than that.’

‘Even more?’

‘Yes. Would you go to these lengths just to stay alive?’ the Doctor asked. He’d finished opening the wall panel, and walked back over to the dais.

‘Not in that revolting condition, no.’

‘No, not in that condition - but in what condition?’ wondered the Doctor. He was about to examine a curious little box by the dais when a shadow fell across the light from the doorway, putting both men on alert. After a moment, K9 glided through the door, the disabled Avitron attached to his snout. The Doctor took the charred remains from his robot companion. ‘K9! Look at that!’ he exclaimed delightedly.

‘Master.’

‘You’re a good dog, K9. Good dog! You’re a hero!’

‘Congratulations are unnecessary, master.’

The Time Lord turned to Kimus, showing him Avitron's remains. 'Isn't that marvellous?'

'Well, it's certainly a relief. But how are we going to get out of here?' asked Kimus.

The Doctor picked up the small box he'd spotted on the dais.

'What does that do, Doctor?'

'I'll tell you what it does, it gives me a splendid idea, that's what it does.' The Doctor glanced about quickly. 'I've got a job for you two. Now, listen. There's a service elevator over there in the far wall' he said, pointing to the panel he'd opened. 'It must go down to the engine room.'

'So?' asked Kimus.

'So you and K9 are going down to sabotage the engines, all right?'

'Affirmative, master,' replied the robot dog, and glided towards the elevator.

'Good - off you go, then!'

Kimus paused for a final question. 'Well, what about you?'

'Me? I'm going to see to the Captain!'

The Doctor weighed the small device in his hands thoughtfully. 'Ready Captain?'

A guard was tearing at the private door to the trophy room with his fingers but was making no progress. Fibuli pushed him out of the way. 'Here, I'll do it,' Fibuli said, and tried the same task with a metal bar.

The Captain watched but -

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die, you fool, die!' she screamed and brought her hands together...

- his sight blurred as the scene reoccurred, like a bad dream to a child. However this 63

held all the menace and chill of death.

Beside him, the angel glowed angrily. 'How much longer must we wait?'

Fibuli turned, and was about to speak to the Nurse when the Doctor appeared through the main entranceway to the Bridge.

'All right, all right, I give up.'

'So, Doctor, you have survived,' said the Captain with smile colder than ice.

‘Yes, I’m afraid I seem unable to break the habit.’

‘And your colleagues?’

‘My colleagues...’ the Doctor said, turning down a despondent thumb.

‘Excellent. And my Polyphase Avitron?’

The Doctor produced the limp remnants of the robotic parrot from behind his back and handed them to a distraught Captain. ‘I’m sorry about that, but it was becoming an infernal nuisance.’

‘Destroyed?!’ The Captain began shaking with rage and grief, a single tear falling from his human eye. ‘By the great parrot of Hades, you shall pay for this with the last drop of your blood! Every corpuscle - do you hear? Mr Fibuli!’

‘Yes sir?’ The deputy ran to his Captain’s side, and they began consulting privately.

‘Ah Captain, I think you’d better hear what I have to say first,’ ventured the Doctor - there was no response. ‘Only I think when you hear what I’ve got to say, you’ll change your mind.’

The huddle broke up, and Fibuli stepped aside to allow the Captain to approach the off-worlder.

‘Guilty,’ spat out the Captain.

‘Please, listen...’ protested the Doctor.

‘Guilty! Guilty! Guards!’

Two soldiers stepped forward and grabbed the Doctor by an arm each. He was pushed up a flight of stairs behind the com, followed by Fibuli, the Nurse and the Captain. They all stood in front of a huge panel in the wall, which slid upwards to reveal a sheer drop down the side of the mountain. Wild wind gusts whipped at the group on the platform from which a length of metal protruded out over the drop.

‘A plank?!’ said the Doctor, disbelievingly.

The Captain was savouring the moment. ‘The theory is quite simple. You walk along it. At the end, you fall off. Drop one thousand feet - dead.’

‘You can’t be serious - he isn’t serious, is he?’ the Doctor asked the deputy. Fibuli nodded solemnly.

‘Captain, you don’t realise what you’re doing. If you just listen to me,’ began the Doctor.

‘I shall listen to you when I hear you scream!’ replied the Captain. He pushed the off-worlder out on to the plank, and raised his android arm. The barrel of a small energy weapon appeared at the end.

‘But, please -’

The Captain fired at the plank’s end, forcing the Doctor into a macabre dance of death, jiggling from foot to foot. He began to lose his balance and was soon teetering on one foot, waving his arms furiously to stay upright in the gusting winds.

The Captain fired again and the Doctor fell, his scream soon lost amidst the wailing of the wind. The Captain lowered the panel by touching a control on his android arm and began laughing hysterically. His evil guffaws filled the Bridge, resonating about with the richness of revenge.

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The Wrath of Xanxia

The Captain’s evil guffaws were echoed by the shrill laughter of Fibuli. Then a warm, booming laughter joined in. Triumph turned to astonishment as the Captain looked up to see the Doctor standing in the centre of the room.

‘Hello, everybody,’ said the smiling survivor.

‘Doctor!’ the Captain exclaimed.

‘Sorry I couldn’t make the jump myself, I’ve got a terrible head for heights.’

‘Then who...?’ the Captain began.

The Doctor produced from under his arm the small box that he’d picked up in the throne room. Touching a control, a duplicate image of the Doctor appeared on the platform beside the Captain and the others.

The Captain wondered why his sensors had not detected the falsehood of the first Doctor. Logical analysis calculated that grief had overloaded his circuits and he made a mental note to prevent such an error reoccurring.

The true Doctor released the button on the image projector and his doppelganger instantly disappeared. 'I've discovered your little secret. We're not all quite as we seem.

Neat little machine, isn't it? And the image it projects might almost be real - it can even carry solid objects.' He activated the device again and the extra Doctor reappeared.

'Hello Doctor!' said his duplicate cheerily.

'Hello. How are you?' the real Doctor greeted him.

'Oh terribly well, can't complain.'

'Goodbye.'

'Bye, bye!'

The Doctor switched off his duplicate. 'And just as I can switch off that image of myself, I can also switch off the image of another, apparently real person. Which one of us will disappear this time?' He turned the projector towards the Nurse and hit the 'off'

switch.

She flickered from white to black and back again, negative to positive, but the Nurse did not disappear as the Doctor's doppelganger had. The Captain cowered back as what he believed was the angel of death strode past him towards the off-worlder. The Doctor was pushing the projector's buttons without success.

'Try all you like, Doctor, it won't work on me,' said the white-clad woman. 'My new body has almost obtained fully corporeal form. It can no longer simply be turned off.' She looked to the guards. 'Guards, seize him!'

The guards were at a loss as what to do or whose command to follow. The pair turned to the Captain for guidance.

'Do as she says,' he said warily.

Far below, Romana, Mula and the Mentiads had finally reached the plateau at the Bridge's 65

entranceway to the mountain.

'Here we are. This is the doorway - can you open it?' Romana asked the Mentiads.

Pralix turned to the others. 'Brothers, we shall direct our minds' energies against the door. It shall open for us.' The Mentiads concentrated on the door for a few moments and it slowly rose upwards and outwards for them, as if by magic.

Romana looked about them and saw two guards coming up the mountain path behind them. 'Pralix, look out!' she warned.

The soldiers began firing and she called to the others to take cover. But the Mentiads stood their ground and instead looked up the side of the mountain. An avalanche of rock and stones came tumbling down, knocking the guards to the ground.

'Very impressive,' said Romana as the group began filing through the doorway.

On the Bridge, the white-clad woman was in control. 'Mr Fibuli, place the crystals in the machine,' she commanded.

The deputy selected a green gem from the tray and slotted it into the psychic interference transmitter, which started humming with power. 'Madranite 1-5,' said Fibuli, and reached for a blue crystal.

At the mountain's entranceway, one of the guards was only stunned by the rock fall, and soon regained consciousness. He crawled to the cover of an aircar on the plateau's edge and aimed his weapon at the group of fugitives.

Romana saw the movement from the corner of her eye. 'Look out!'

The Mentiads turned to concentrate and could not. They looked at each other wonderingly.

'The power - it's gone. The power's gone!' cried out Pralix.

The guard fired, and one of the Mentiads collapsed, dead. Romana grabbed the energy weapon that Mula had taken from the unconscious guard and aiming, expertly downed the remaining guard.

'Pralix, what happened?' Romana asked.

'I don't know, we can't tell.' Pralix replied. 'The contact between us has gone. We can't function together. There's just a dull buzzing sound in our minds.'

Probably a psychic interference transmitter thought Romana. 'Well, so much for the paranormal.' She looked ruefully at the energy weapon she had just used to knock out the second guard. 'It's back to brute force, I suppose.'

The group filed into the mountain, the Mentiads mourning their dead brother.

The commanding woman stood in the centre of the Bridge, surveying all around her. 'Is it working?' she hissed at Fibuli, who was tending the psychic interference transmitter.

'Yes, full power,' he finally answered.

‘Good,’ she said. ‘Now we’ll show these zombies who rules here.’

‘So - Xanxia, the tyrant queen of Zanak,’ said the Doctor, with no surprise in his voice.

The woman ignored him, and continued talking to Fibuli. ‘Bring the manifest,’ she ordered.

‘What about the real you, eh?’ the Doctor persisted. ‘That wizened old body in the time dams back there.’

The Nurse, now revealed as the hated Xanxia, did not even look at the Doctor to answer him. ‘That thing is not me,’ she said haughtily. ‘This is now the real Queen Xanxia.’

‘No, no, no - not yet, it isn’t. Your new body is based on a cell projection system, isn’t 66

it?’

The Queen turned to him. ‘Permanent regeneration, based on cells in my old body and thus containing all the memory patterns and all the brilliance built up over the centuries.’

‘Ahh - but it’s still unstable, isn’t it?’ persisted the Time Lord. ‘You’re still dependent on the last few seconds of life left in the old body.’

‘I’m nearly complete, my molecular structure has almost bound together, finally and forever. That is why you could not turn me off.’

The Doctor chuckled to himself, just loud enough for the enraged ruler to hear. ‘It won’t work, you know. Believe me - I’m an old hand at regenerations. It can’t be done that way, those time dams back there, they just do not work.’

‘I have calculated every detail - I shall live forever!’

‘Live forever? What sort of dream is that?’

‘It is the greatest dream of all. The greatest quest in all history. The secret of eternal life, eternal youth.’

‘Bafflegab! My dear, I’ve never heard such bafflegab in all my lives.’

‘Have a care, Doctor,’ Xanxia warned him menacingly.

‘Piffle, hogwash! You should know better at your age!’

‘Life, Doctor, is the most precious thing in the universe. It is to be cherished, preserved...’

‘You poor misguided fool, you. Listen...’

‘You dare to mock me?’

‘Yes!’

Xanxia lashed out, striking the Doctor full across the face with the back of her hand. A sharp gem on a ring cut cruelly into the skin just above his top lip. The Doctor held a hand to his wound, which was bleeding slightly, then straightened and smiled triumphantly at the Queen.

‘Ahh - now we’re getting somewhere, aren’t we?’

‘You shall die now for your insolence.’ Xanxia went to the Captain who had been sitting forgotten in the com, nursing the remains of Avitron.

The tyrant ruler touched a control on her waist belt, and he began to rise involuntarily from the com, raising his arm to strike down the off-worlder.

‘Life is to be cherished and preserved all right - as long as it’s yours and nobody else’s.’ The Doctor spoke in urgent tones as if to an ally. ‘Captain, Captain! Listen to me, this concerns you...’

‘We will hear what he thinks he knows. But say your piece quickly, Doctor. Time is running out for you,’ Xanxia declared mockingly.

‘Not nearly as fast as it’s running out for you,’ the Doctor retorted, and continued speaking to the Captain. ‘You’re being used, you know, you’re being used by her, just to do her dirty work. And what’s your reward, Captain, eternal life?’

‘What do you know of eternal life?’ demanded Xanxia.

‘Enough to know that it can’t be sustained by those time dams back there. The time dams slow down the flow of time over your body, your original body, all right. But when you get to the last few seconds of life in real time, the time flow has to get slower and slower and slower. Right?’

The Queen, with the confidence of total self-belief, said, ‘When this body becomes fully corporeal -’

‘It never will, not ever,’ butted in the Doctor.

‘My calculations -’

‘Are wrong!’

‘No! Impossible!’

‘Inevitable! Because they are based on a false premise!’

The two foes were virtually screaming at one another. The Queen ranted on, but the merest hint of doubt had crept into her voice.

‘I gutted my own planet Zanak, for all the energy it contained. I’ve ransacked planets from Bandraginus V to Calufrax - do you think I’m going to stop now?’

Now the Doctor replied in coolly rational tones against Xanxia’s childish petulance.

‘What next, suns? It’s just no good,’ he said, almost pleading with her. ‘The energy needs of the time dams increase exponentially - why do you think you need more and more new planets? There just isn’t enough energy in the universe to keep the time dams going forever. In the end you will die.’

‘You’re lying,’ countered the Queen desperately, refusing to accept the truth of his arguments. ‘You’re trying to save your worthless neck.’

‘I just don’t think it’s worth all that effort,’ said an almost jovial Doctor, draping a friendly arm around Fibuli’s shoulders. ‘What do you think, Mr Fibuli, mm? Captain - what do you think, Captain?’

Xanxia touched another control on her waist belt, and the half-man, half-robot crumpled like a puppet with its strings snapped.

‘Ahh - so that’s how you control him,’ the Doctor observed aloud.

The Queen reactivated her half-human plaything. The Mentiads must be approaching the Bridge now - Captain, deal with them.’

Now was his chance, thought the deranged Captain. Now he would rid himself of his tormentor once and for all. Abandoning his more elaborate plan, the Captain pulled a blade from within his tunic and with his human hand raised it to stab deep into the centre of this venomous angel of destruction. ‘By all the...’

Xanxia regarded her puppet coolly. ‘I said, deal with them,’ she said, and twisted another control on her waist belt.

The Captain felt his willpower sapped away, analog overriding emotion. He fought for a moment, but then his android half won over, striking the blade away from his human hand. When he finally spoke, his voice was cold, clinical and computer-like. The machine had won, it seemed. ‘Mr Fibuli - seal the Bridge,’ it ordered.

Romana, Mula and the Mentiads found themselves at the end of the inertia neutralisation corridor.

‘Right. Everybody stand still,’ Romana instructed.

‘What is this?’ Pralix asked.

‘It’s a very sophisticated transport system. Here we go.’ Romana activated the controls, and they accelerated down the corridor. Her companions looked amazed. ‘Fun, isn’t it? The main problem with trying to cover long distances fast is that you have to spend as much time decelerating as you do accelerating because you have to overcome the body’s inertia.’

‘What’s that?’ Mula wanted to know.

‘You know. Like momentum? They seem to have found some way here of cancelling out the force of inertia, so you accelerate all the way and simply stop dead at the other end.

It’s very clever.’

‘It’s very fast,’ Mula observed nervously.

Romana suddenly clicked her fingers. ‘Got it!’

‘Got what?’

‘The Nurse!’

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Mula was even more confused. ‘You need a nurse?’

Romana shook her head. ‘The Captain’s nurse - she’s always hovering round him.

Whenever anybody else talks to him he rants and shouts at them. But with her he just seethes.’

‘So?’

‘So she must have some power over him. So if the Captain’s making this planet leap about eating other planets, it must be for her. Who is she?’

Pralix was just behind Mula and Romana, and had been silently listening to their conversation as they sped along the corridor ‘I don’t know what you’re saying,’ he confessed.

‘Never mind ... Ah! What was the name of that queen who drained the planet of everything it had?’ Romana wanted to know.

‘Queen Xanxia,’ Pralix answered. ‘But she’s been dead for centuries.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Nobody can live that long,’ Pralix objected.

‘That’s not necessarily true,’ Romana replied.

Mula sided with Pralix. ‘But the legend says...’

Their discussion was curtailed as they reached the end of the inertia neutralisation corridor and came to a sudden stop. Romana hurried toward the lift. ‘Come on!’ She herded the group into the lift chamber. They huddled around as the door slammed down behind them.

‘It’s all right. It’s a lift,’ Romana assured them, as the chamber began to rise. ‘Now, where was I ... Oh, yes. Supposing it happened this way. The Captain’s pirate ship crashed on Zanak, and his body was terribly mutilated. We know he must be an engineering genius, so it’s quite possible he had highly sophisticated medico-cybernetic equipment on the ship...’

‘What?’ Mula was lost again.

‘Well if you’re a pirate, you’re always having bits lopped off in fights, aren’t you?’

Romana reasoned.

‘Are you?’

Romana nodded. ‘Now, supposing Xanxia rescued the Captain, and used that equipment to rebuild his body, but did it in such a way that she retained control over him - she’d have a criminal hyper-engineering genius as her slave, wouldn’t she?’

‘Yes, but...’ Pralix interjected.

‘Is there anything in the legend which flatly contradicts that?’ Romana asked.

‘No, but...’

‘But what?’

‘I don’t know,’ Pralix confessed. ‘Just but...’

It was a massacre.

The council of elders had spoken in reasoned terms to the leader of the Captain’s guards, talking about Balaton’s contribution to Zanak society, and had sought some explanation for his murder. Radune had talked eloquently and with great passion, but it was all for naught. Once the elders had finished speaking, the leader of the guards ordered his troops to open fire. He’d had enough of this irksome council and decided to rid himself of it once and for all.

None of the elders survived, and Enak only got away by good fortune. News of the massacre spread across the settlement like wildfire, and soon citizens were attacking the guards, pulling their weapons away from them. Casualties were high, but the guards were slowly being overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. The leader died trying to get a 69

message through to the Bridge about the revolt.

Rebellion had taken hold of Zanak.

With the rebellion drawing troops away from protecting the Bridge, Romana, Mula and the Mentiads reached the entranceway to the Bridge without further losses. But when they got there, the doors were firmly sealed.

‘I get the feeling the Doctor and Kimus are not in control here,’ said Mula.

The occupants of the Bridge were gripped with a feverish siege mentality.

Xanxia strutted about the chamber, proclaiming her victory. ‘We are impregnable. The Mentiads are powerless. The guards will pick them off at will. Captain - is Calufrax now entirely rendered?’

The subjugated half-man put the question to his deputy. ‘Mr Fibuli?’

‘Er, yes sir, all the energy reducible minerals have been mined, processed and stored.

And the residue has been processed in the normal way, sir. Operations on Calufrax are now complete. There are reports of an uprising in the main settlement. Apparently the citizens are attacking the guards after the council of elders was massacred in the main courtyard.’

‘Ungrateful fools!’ spat out Xanxia. ‘I give them unimaginable wealth and they complain about a few deaths. Once we have reached the new planet, we shall crush this rebellious rabble once and for all. Meanwhile, don’t bother me with such trivia, Mr Fibuli.

Have you located a planet where we can find the mineral PJX 1-8 to restore our engines to full working order?’

‘PJX 1-8?’ said the Doctor. ‘But that’s quartz.’

‘Yes,’ Fibuli confirmed.

‘Yes, but from where? Where?’ the Doctor demanded to know.

‘It’s the planet Terra, in the star system Sol.’

‘Captain, we will mine that planet immediately. Prepare to make the jump,’ said Xanxia.

‘But that’s Earth!’ The Doctor was aghast that the little blue-green planet he was so fond of was to be the next morsel for Zanak’s insatiable hunger for energy. ‘Earth! Do you really mean to go on with this madness? Don’t you understand you can’t win? Are you going to take everyone else with you? Captain - Earth is an inhabited planet. Billions and billions of people - you can’t be that insane! You’re going to throw billions of good lives after bad?’

‘Jump immediately, Captain,’ ordered the Queen.

‘It will take ten minutes to set the coordinates,’ replied the emotionless Captain.

‘Ten minutes, Captain,’ Fibuli confirmed.

‘Mr Fibuli?’

‘Sir?’

‘Announce a new golden age of prosperity,’ the Captain directed.

‘But Captain,’ Fibuli objected, ‘the last one was only yesterday.’

‘Do it, Mr Fibuli,’ the Captain insisted.

The Doctor tried another tactic. ‘You can’t possibly succeed, the Mentiads will destroy you.’

The others ignored him, so Fibuli explained. ‘No, Doctor. Not whilst we have the psychic interference transmitter.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Yes, yes, you see, while that’s fully operational, the Mentiads are powerless...’

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While Fibuli was engrossed in his explanation, the Doctor activated the door control for the Bridge’s entranceway. Fibuli noticed the door opening slowly. ‘Oh – the door!’

‘It’s all right, I’ll close it,’ the Doctor assured him.

‘Oh thank you,’ said Fibuli automatically, and before he could react, the Doctor had run from the Bridge, locking the door behind him.

‘Stop him!’ shouted the Captain.

Xanxia quickly overruled his command. 'Leave him. There's no time.'

Fibuli checked his readings 'Dematerialisation minus nine minutes, Captain.'

'Is the engine room still sealed?' the Queen asked Fibuli.

'Yes, sir.'

'Then he can do no damage.' She looked at the Captain. 'Xanxia shall live!'

Romana was more relieved than she would admit when the Doctor appeared from the Bridge.

'Kimus and K9?' he asked, seeing that Mula and the Mentiads were present.

'They were with you,' replied his companion.

'No, I sent them to sabotage the engines. The planet's about to jump again.'

'Doctor, we're fighting a losing battle,' said Romana. 'The Mentiads can't get their psychokinetic powers to work.'

'Yes, I know. They've got a psychic interference transmitter on the Bridge.'

'Here's Kimus,' Pralix observed.

Kimus ran up to the group. 'It's no use, Doctor. The engine room is barricaded with steel, several inches thick. K9 can't even scorch it.'

'Where is K9?'

Kimus looked about and realised the mobile computer was missing. 'Err, I thought he was following on. His batteries are exhausted from trying to burn through the door.'

The Time Lord jabbed a finger at Kimus and Mula. 'You two stay here and cover the Bridge - the rest of us, to the engine room!' He ran off towards the elevation chamber, followed by Romana and the surviving Mentiads.

'What are we going to do, Doctor?' called Romana as she hurried after him.

'What I always do, Romana - improvise!'

A Spanner in the Works

K9 was barely maintaining his computer support systems by the time his master arrived, so badly drained of energy was the robot dog. 'Master...' he said weakly.

The Doctor and Romana crouched beside the dog. 'Come on K9, we need you,' the Doctor urged.

'Batteries - my - nearly -exhausted - are.'

'Listen, K9, that's all right,' said the Doctor encouragingly. 'The Mentiads can still open the engine room door if you can set up a counter interference in the psychic plane.'

Wavelength 337.98 micropars - can you do that?'

'Negative - master - recharge - I - imperative - it - is...'

'That's all right, K9. You're still my best friend.'

'Doctor...' K9 said faintly, and his head slumped forward.

'What? What?'

K9's next words were virtually inaudible, so the Doctor crouched by his snout to hear them. 'Oh, K9,' said the Doctor quietly after a pause.

'What did he say?' asked Romana anxiously.

'He said there's a power cable right behind me,' replied the Doctor, stepping to the wall by the engine room door and ripping a power cable and its connector from a bracket.

'What are you doing Doctor?'

'Trying to get a power supply to recharge K9.'

'But Doctor, it takes a long time to recharge K9,' Romana pointed out.

'Romana,' said the Doctor patiently as he stripped down the power cable, 'I assume you've already taught your grandmother all you know about egg sucking or you wouldn't be standing around here with time on your hands. Quick, open his inspection hatch.'

'Right.' Romana opened a panel in K9's side and connected the cable to the robot dog.

‘Now, those maniacs in there are about to try and materialise Zanak around the planet Earth, and I swear that if I have to save that planet one more time I shall go stark raving mad. Plug him in.’

K9 began whirring back into life as the power surged through his systems, and his head raised.

‘K9 - can you divert any of this current into your frequency projectors?’ asked the Doctor urgently.

‘It is very difficult master. Much of my circuitry was damaged fighting the Polyphase Avitron.’

‘That horrid parrot?’ Romana shuddered. ‘Did you kill it K9?’

‘Affirmative mistress.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Romana, billions of lives are at stake, can we chat about parrots later?’

‘Master, the voltage has dropped,’ K9 reported.

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‘That means that some of the pre-demat circuitry has already been activated. K9, can you project any kind of counter-interference on that wavelength?’

‘Affirmative, master.’

‘Good boy, keep it going, K9.’

Pralix and the other Mentiads looked to each other with wonder. ‘It’s clearing. The buzzing - it’s clearing!’ said Pralix.

‘What? Enough to open the door?’ asked the Time Lord.

‘Brothers,’ said Pralix, and the Mentiads concentrated on the door as one. Nothing happened.

‘Doctor, we’re not nearly strong enough to open it,’ said a straining Pralix.

‘More power, K9, more power,’ the Doctor told his robot companion.

‘Doctor,’ Romana said, taking him a few steps aside from the others.

‘What?’

‘Do you remember what happened when we first tried to materialise on Calufax?’ she asked. The Doctor nodded. ‘We couldn’t, because Zanak was trying to materialise in the same place.’

‘That’s right!’ said the Doctor, seizing her suggestion. ‘And if we couldn’t materialise, then neither can Zanak. Quick - back to the TARDIS! K9, keep generating power; Pralix -

read my mind. What can you see?’

‘A strip of metal, subdivided at one end with an acute angle halfway along,’ Pralix replied, puzzled.

‘Right,’ the Doctor confirmed. ‘Now whatever happens, keep concentrating on my mind. Come on, Romana, we’ve got a planet to save.’

‘What were you thinking of Doctor?’ Romana asked him, as the two Gallifreyans ran towards the lift.

‘A bent fork.’

‘Why should anyone want to bend a fork?’

‘I haven’t the vaguest idea,’ the Doctor confessed. He stood aside to allow Romana to enter the lift, and stepped in after her.

‘Doctor, I’ve worked it out,’ said Romana as the lift began to descend. ‘Listen...’

‘I can’t hear anything.’

‘This is important, Doctor. That nurse is really Queen Xanxia.’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘And she has the Captain in her power!’

‘Yes, I know,’ said the Doctor again.

‘She actually has control over the robot half of his body from that black box she carries.’

‘Yes, I know, I’ve seen her do it...’ the Doctor paused and stared at her. ‘How did you know?’

‘I just worked it out.’

‘Without seeing anything? Do you know, that’s very clever of you?’

‘Why, thank you Doctor,’ said Romana, feeling enormously pleased with herself.

The Captain was standing at the dematerialisation console reverently. From here he could pilot Zanak's star-jumps across the galaxy. The controls of the demat device could deliver him from his tormentor, thought the Captain.

Behind him, Fibuli was checking the dematerialisation controls. 'Captain, sir.'

'What is it Mr Fibuli?' asked Xanxia.

Fibuli looked at her anxiously, still not quite having come to terms with the shift of 73

power. 'Er...'

'Speak Mr Fibuli,' the Captain instructed him.

'Who am I to obey sir?'

'Who have you always obeyed?' the Captain asked him.

'You, Captain...'

'No!' the Captain thundered. 'Every word I speak, every move I make has been monitored, checked and controlled from that devil woman's box! Why else would I not have destroyed the hell hag in the Time Dams? You have obeyed her! She is your Captain!' he spat bitterly.

'And Mr Fibuli, do not think of trying to destroy me now,' Xanxia added. 'The Time Dams are booby trapped. The slightest disturbance in the Time Fields and the whole Bridge explodes. It has never been my intention to die. It is certainly not my intention to die alone.'

'Dematerialisation minus four minutes,' the Captain reported.

'Hurry!' Xanxia urged.

Fibuli moved to check the psychic interference transmitter, a worried frown appeared on his face. 'Captain, sir.'

'Yes?' replied Xanxia arrogantly.

'The psychic interference transmitter, sir, there seems to be something counter-jamming it.'

'What?!' roared the Captain. Nothing must disrupt this, one of the final stages of his plan! 'We must dematerialise in three minutes.' He activated the communications system and addressed his guards. 'Alert, alert. Someone is using a counter-jamming frequency projector. Find it and -'

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die, you fool, die!' she screamed and brought her hands together with a sound...

‘- Destroy it immediately,’ finished the Captain at last, clutching a hand to his head to block out the vision.

The deputy approached his Captain gingerly. ‘Captain - do you suppose any of the guards know what a counter-jamming frequency projector looks like?’

The half-man, half-robot addressed his guards again after a thoughtful pause. ‘Destroy everything!’

‘Captain! We must dematerialise instantly!’ Xanxia declared. ‘We can waste no further time!’

‘Dematerialisation in three minutes,’ reported the Captain resolutely.

‘Captain!’

Romana and the Doctor were nearing the end of the inertia neutralisation corridor when an energy bolt fired behind them.

Romana glanced back. ‘Doctor! Behind us - guards!’ A pair of guards were pursuing them along the corridor.

‘Cover your head, we’re almost there,’ the Doctor told her. They ducked, and soon reached the end of the corridor. ‘Get off now,’ the Doctor said urgently, and they headed for the exit.

As Romana reached the door, she realised the Doctor had paused by the corridor control panel and was examining it. ‘Come on, Doctor!’

‘No, wait,’ he replied. ‘Wait a minute. The inertia neutraliser. You know, I think the conservation of momentum is a very important law in physics, don’t you?’

‘Yes,’ Romana agreed - anything to get the Doctor moving.

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‘I don’t think anyone should tamper with it, do you?’ he continued, and began fiddling with switches on the inertia neutralisation controls.

‘No,’ Romana agreed.

‘No, nor do I.’

The two pursing guards found themselves accelerating as they approached the end of the corridor. Instead of the sudden drop in speed at the end, they went flying out

through the doorway and slammed into the wall opposite, knocking both quite unconscious.

The Doctor looked down at the unfortunate pair. 'Newton's revenge! Come on, Romana - no time to lose!' he said, and ran out onto the plateau.

In moments the two Gallifreyans were airborne in another 'borrowed' aircar and heading for the settlement.

'Newton? Who's Newton?' asked Romana.

'Old Isaac? Friend of mine on Earth - discovered gravity. Well, I say he discovered gravity, I had to give him a bit of a prod.'

'What did you do?'

'Climbed up a tree.'

'And?'

'Dropped an apple on his head.'

'Ahh - and so he discovered gravity...'

'No, no - he told me to clear off out of his tree. I explained it to him afterwards at dinner,' said a chuckling Doctor.

Romana looked down at the clusters of building passing below them. 'Parts of the settlement are burning, Doctor.'

'Yes - maybe the rebellion is more widespread than Xanxia knows.'

Romana pointed out a familiar blue box in one of the courtyards. 'There's the TARDIS, Doctor.'

'Right, going in to land.' The Doctor banked the aircar around and they began to descend.

'Doctor! The time! We'll never make it!' Romana said urgently.

'Never say that if you're a Time Lord,' the Doctor advised her.

'Never say what?'

'Never.'

'Never what?'

'What?'

'Never what?'

‘Never mind.’

‘Never mind what?’

‘What?’

‘Oh, never mind,’ Romana sighed.

‘We’ll do it somehow,’ the Doctor assured her.

‘We can’t.’

‘Never say that to a Time Lord.’

‘Oh, you’re impossible.’

‘No, just very, very improbable,’ the Doctor grinned, as the aircar finally landed.

Outside the engine room, Pralix and the other Mentiads were still concentrating their energies on the Doctor’s thoughts. The metal construction of the Bridge and the great distance involved was causing them considerable strain. A trickle of sweat ran down Pralix’s face as Kimus ran up to the group.

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‘Pralix, Pralix, what’s happening? Where’s the Doctor?’

‘We’re concentrating on the Doctor’s mind - do not disturb us,’ replied the young Mentiad through gritted teeth, ‘We are still too weak to move the door.’

Kimus turned to K9. ‘K9?’

‘Counter-jamming field increasing - slowly,’ the robot dog stated.

‘Good, good,’ said Kimus. ‘I’d better get back to Mula.’ As he ran back to the elevation chamber, Kimus realised he had not told the woman he loved about the brutal death of her grandfather. I can’t delay any longer, he thought, and stood in the elevation chamber, slowly rising, burdened down with the grief he must inflict upon her.

The Doctor strode through the TARDIS doors into the central control room and immediately began manipulating the console. ‘This is the most dangerous manoeuvre the TARDIS

has ever attempted,' he told Romana as she came in, closing the doors behind her. 'Now, don't take it personally, old girl, just try and survive. Earth coordinates, Romana?'

'58044684884.'

'Good. Multi-loop stabiliser, synchronic feedback.'

His companion could not help suppressing a smile as the seldom-used controls were activated.

'Doctor, if we're going to try and materialise in exactly the same point in time and space, how do we know when to do it? It only happened as a fluke the first time.'

'That's a good point. Now listen, Zanak could start to dematerialise at any moment, we've got to be spot-on. You watch the warp oscilloscope and gravity dilation readings.

They'll both peak when Zanak goes into demat and remat mode. And brace yourself,' he added for good measure.

Romana went to the warp oscilloscope and gravity dilation meters as the TARDIS central column began to rise and fall, ready for full dematerialisation.

Fibuli and the Captain were both standing at the demat device, watched by an impatient Xanxia. 'How soon, Captain, how soon? This waiting is intolerable - we must jump. We must jump!'

The Captain turned to his tormentor. 'We are now ready.'

'Then jump! Jump instantly!'

He turned back to the console. 'Planet Terra, star system Sol, galactic coordinates 58044684884. Surround jump commences in five seconds. Four, three two...'

A touch of the demat switch and Zanak was screaming through space towards its new prey - Earth!

At exactly that moment, Romana saw the two crucial meters peak. 'Now, Doctor, dematerialise now!'

The Doctor sent his craft hurtling off into the vortex.

'Doing well so far, Doctor,' said Romana, and got a withering look for her efforts.

The TARDIS takeoff did not go unnoticed on the Bridge. Fibuli saw one of the instrument panels flare strangely. ‘Captain, sir - there was a slight disturbance on the warp oscilloscope during dematerialisation.’

‘Monitor it,’ the Captain replied. ‘Prepare for rematerialisation surrounding Terra in five seconds!’

‘Rematerialisation commence - now!’ echoed Romana. Then chaos struck the TARDIS.

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The Bridge was wracked with distortions that threatened to tear it asunder. Walls wavering and curving so much it seemed they would all explode inwards. The people inside felt as if the invisible hands of giants were tearing at their skin and bones, trying to pull them apart.

‘Mr Fibuli! It’s happening again!’ bellowed the Captain.

‘What is it?’ cried out Xanxia.

‘It must be the Doctor’s vessel, Captain, trying to materialise in the same space as us,’ surmised Fibuli correctly. ‘Every circuit’s jamming!’

The TARDIS, too, was being torn apart by the spatial distortion.

‘There’s no way we can survive this!’ called out Romana above the terrible noise.

‘We’ll have to back off!’

‘We can’t!’ the Doctor insisted. ‘The moment we back off, the Earth dies!’

‘It’s getting worse!’

‘It’ll go on getting worse until one of us explodes, or the Mentiads raise that door,’ replied the Doctor.

He stepped away from the central console – like a person resigned to his fate, thought Romana. ‘What are you doing?’ she asked.

‘I’m opening a communications channel.’ The Doctor spoke verbally as well as telepathically, in an effort to increase his range. ‘Pralix - Pralix, can you hear me?’

Outside the engine room, the newly emerged leader of the Mentiads responded to the faint message, hampered by the terrible vibrations all around them. Pralix turned to the others.

‘Brothers, the Doctor is trying to reach us - we must concentrate together - it is far too faint for me to hear.’

The Doctor reached a decision. ‘Romana, switch off the TARDIS force field.’

Romana was stunned. ‘What?! But that’s madness. It’s the only protection we’ve got!’

‘I know - but that protection is stopping me from communicating with the Mentiads - just do it,’ replied the Doctor tersely.

Romana reached out a hand to the force field controls. ‘It’s been nice knowing you, Doctor.’

‘And you.’

Romana switched off the force field and the spatial distortion became a dozen times worse. Explosions ripped across the central console unit and she knew something was going to give any moment - almost certainly them...

The deterioration was also felt on the Bridge.

‘Captain, it’s getting worse - we must back off!’ cried out Fibuli.

‘More power, Captain, more power!’ screamed Xanxia.

The Captain just stood at the demat device silently while everything fell about him, and pushed the planet’s spatial engines far beyond their limits. Metal and technicians cried out as the distortions became unbearable.

Romana watched helplessly as the Doctor projected, with the aid of the TARDIS telepathic circuits, a visible astral image of Pralix and the other Mentiads onto the scanner screen.

‘Doctor, are you there?’ said Pralix. ‘What’s happening?’

‘Pralix, do you have the strength to raise the door yet?’ the Doctor asked.

‘No, Doctor - our minds are so weak we couldn’t lift anything bigger than a spanner.’

‘A spanner?’ The words seemed to spark something within the Time Lord. ‘A spanner! That’s it - a spanner in the works! Pralix, forget the door - can you project your minds beyond it?’

Romana felt the shuddering get worse, though that hardly seemed possible now. A look at the console displays between shudders proved her right. ‘Doctor, the TARDIS is about to explode - it’s going to explode!’

He did not react, but on the scanner a new image formed, of the engine room’s interior. In the centre of the room a discarded spanner lay incongruously on the floor.

‘There - on the floor,’ directed the Doctor. The spanner slowly rose from the floor and hovered in the air. ‘Now, follow my movements. Macrovector particle analyser, omni-modular thermocron there! Megaphoton discharge link!’ As he spoke, the spanner hovered over each of the machines in the engine room.

‘What do we do?’ Pralix asked.

‘Hit it!’ the Doctor told him.

The spanner flew violently down at the chosen target, which exploded outwards.

Nearby machinery blew up in an ever-expanding chain reaction across the engine room, and the mechanical carnage spread through the whole structure.

On the Bridge, there was a moment of total silence and peace - then the impact hit. One after another, the towering panels of circuitry exploded outwards like a string of fireworks.

Metal debris, wiring, sparks and fire flew around the room, shrapnel imbedding itself cruelly into unprotected bodies.

When the explosions finally stopped, the only sounds were of people and machinery calling out together their own individual cries of pain.

The Doctor regained consciousness first, moments before Romana. Both were lying askew on the TARDIS floor where they were thrown when the final explosion hit.

‘You can never relax for a moment in this job!’ the Time Lord quipped.

‘We’ve done it, Doctor,’ said a relieved Romana.

‘Yes. The question is will we ever be able to do anything else again? Shall we try and materialise?’ He stood, and guided the TARDIS into a landing in the throne room, homing in on the immense and now very unstable power of the time dams. The pair emerged into the chamber, and Romana got her first look at the real Queen Xanxia.

‘Is that her?’ asked the curious Romana.

‘Yes, that’s her - the old harpy.’

‘It’s a pity we can’t just switch her off.’

‘Yes, but any interference with the time dams field though would trigger off an explosion that would blast us off this planet,’ said the Doctor.

‘Well, what do we do then?’

‘I think we adapt the Captain’s plan.’ He began to stride towards the trophy room.

This was something he had not explained to Romana yet.

She hurried after him. ‘The Captain’s plan?’

The Captain opened his human eye and winced. His massive exoskeleton had protected him from most of the explosions, but he was still human enough to sustain injuries. The burly figure rose to his knees, and then he caught sight of his deputy lying askew nearby.

The Captain crawled over to Fibuli, but the trickle of blood from the first lieutenant’s mouth and his lifeless eyes spoke eloquently of his state. The Captain reached down, almost tenderly, and lifted the glasses from Fibuli’s face. ‘Mr Fibuli - dead. He was a good man.’

Then his tormentor, his angel of death, was back, taunting him, mocking his last human emotion - grief. Could nothing kill this spawn of evil, he wondered.

‘Pull yourself together, Captain,’ said Xanxia scathingly. ‘We can still defeat that rabble out there.’ She marched off to assess the damage levels.

The Captain looked at -

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. ‘Die, you fool, die!’ she screamed and brought her hands together with a sound like thunder...

- her and realised death would come - the vision told him so. He turned back to his departed deputy. 'Somehow, Mr Fibuli, my friend - you will be avenged!' The Captain without an army rose, and went to his private console.

'What are you doing?' demanded Xanxia.

He extracted a circuit board from the damaged unit. 'If I can divert power left in the auxiliary areas of the Bridge, we can use it to keep the rebels out until we're ready,' he re-79

plied. It was a lie.

Xanxia watched him work on the equipment impatiently. 'Hurry, Captain, hurry!'

The engine room door that had frustrated the Mentiads and K9 for so long proved to be their salvation when the explosions began, protecting them from harm. Once the results of their handiwork had blown out, the yellow-garbed group picked themselves up slowly.

'The interference - it's completely gone!' said Pralix delightedly. 'The explosions must have knocked out the transmitter on the Bridge. We must go there to confront the evil that has blighted our world for so long.'

The Mentiads and K9 began to make their way slowly upwards through the levels because the upwards elevation chamber was no longer functioning.

Above them, outside the Bridge, Kimus was comforting Mula. Both had escaped the crippling of the Captain's engines remarkably unscathed, but the young woman was still coping with the news of her grandfather's death.

'We can't let Balaton's death - and the deaths of all those killed by the Captain and his guards - be for nothing!' pleaded Kimus.

Mula realised he was right. She rose from the floor and embraced him warmly, tears streaming down her face. 'Thank you,' she said, and they kissed passionately.

The pair had just returned to trying to open the locking wheel on the Bridge's main entranceway when K9, Pralix and the other Mentiads arrived.

'It's no use. We can't get it open,' said Kimus.

'Then we Mentiads must try to open it,' said Pralix, looking to the others.

'Brothers, our strength is increasing,' Kintha observed. 'It may be possible now. We must try!'

The Mentiads began concentrating on the locking wheel, urging it; willing it to turn...

‘The Captain’s trophy room - well, what do you think of it?’

The sight that had earlier rendered the Doctor almost speechless stunned Romana.

‘Incredible,’ she finally stammered. ‘A masterpiece of gravitic geometry.’

‘Yes, obviously all the forces cancel each other perfectly or else - boom!’

Romana was musing out loud. ‘So all that shouting and blustering was just an act to lull Xanxia into a false sense of security while he built this.’

‘Yes, let that be a lesson to you, my girl. Never take anything at its face value,’ said the Doctor, wagging a remonstrating finger at her playfully. ‘Now - the Captain’s plan, we must be able to use it...’

‘But he’ll have the controls on the Bridge.’

‘Yes.’

‘Wait a minute,’ said Romana, in the grip of a brain wave. ‘The only way the Captain could destroy Xanxia without blowing himself and this whole mountain to atoms would be to get inside the perimeter of the time dams without disturbing it, right?’

‘Right!’

‘Which would require astronomic energy resources.’

‘Here they are,’ said the Doctor, gesturing expansively at the array of trophies. ‘All perfectly balanced out.’

‘So when he has enough of them, all he has to do is alter the balance slightly and create a standing vortex in the middle of the time field. So time starts up again at the normal speed and the Queen dies!’

‘Right!’ replied the Time Lord. ‘A bit like pouring buckets of water down the plug hole of a bath to drown a spider in the pipes, but there you go...’

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‘Brilliant! But I still don’t see how it helps us.’

‘And it wouldn’t have worked, anyway,’ added the Doctor.

‘Why not? The theory’s sound enough.’

‘Yes, but Calufrax isn’t.’

‘Calufrax?’

The Doctor pointed at the display case labelled Calufrax, which now held a suspended globe like the others. 'Calufrax is not a normal planet. It's an artificial metricised structure consisting of a substance with a variable atomic weight.'

'So that means Calufrax - the entire planet -'

'Is the second segment of the Key to Time.'

'Of course! No wonder the Tracer kept going mad!' said Romana, realising at last.

'Try it now,' the Doctor suggested.

'What?'

'The Tracer. You have still got it?'

A look of growing concern appeared on Romana's face 'I thought you had it.'

'What?' The Doctor fished in his pockets, and eventually produced the device sheepishly. He pointed it at the crushed planet of Calufrax and the Tracer crackled happily.

'But we can't move it,' pointed out Romana. 'We can't move anything here. If we do we'll just upset the whole system and create a gravity whirlpool.'

'Not if I do something immensely clever,' said a beaming Doctor, and headed towards the Bridge, followed by his bewildered companion.

'Have you done it? Are you ready?' demanded Xanxia.

The Captain leaned back in the com, clutching the glasses he had taken from Fibuli's body. 'Yes. At last - I am ready.'

The entranceway from the trophy room began to rise slowly, distracting the Queen.

'Captain, look!' she cried out, and turned to find him standing, staring at her.

He held out the circuit board and plunged his android arm into it, fusing them together with a blinding flash, in an effort to activate his plan. 'Xanxia! I commit myself to the Sky Demon, but by his bones I shall take you with me! I shall be free from you, you hag!'

'You are a fool, Captain! You have failed and you will fail again!' Xanxia screamed.

'What are you doing?'

The Doctor ducked under the rising door and ran onto the Bridge. Seeing the situation, he shouted, 'No Captain, don't do it, it won't work!'

Suddenly the Captain felt the vision come again, but this time it was not a vision, but reality. He knew what would happen next.

...The angel blazed white, aflame with fury. 'Die, you fool, die!' she screamed and brought her hands together with a sound like thunder. Thousands of sensors cried out inputs of pain, systems and sinews collapsing...

Romana ran onto the Bridge in time to see the metal casing on the left side of the Captain's head explode, showering sparks and fire. Xanxia just stood, laughing mockingly.

The Captain's body jerked about as explosions ripped through his exoskeleton and then his huge, charred frame slumped in the com.

... Suddenly he was afloat, but this was not memory or precognition. It was a warm, soothing darkness, free of pain or worries, like the darkness of space he had come to love so much and yearned for while imprisoned on this world by his own physical form and the whims of the tyrant Queen Xanxia. That was gone now, and the Captain felt like a million atoms, all drifting and floating in space, slowly dissipating across the cosmos. Embrace me now, stars, thought the Captain and, finally, smiled...

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Xanxia snatched an energy weapon from one of the guards' corpses and trained it on the interfering off-worlder who had ruined her plans forever. 'And now, Doctor, it's your turn to die.'

'No, please, I can explain everything,' he said, stalling for time. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the main door to the Bridge opening, succumbing at last to the Mentiads' powers.

'No, Doctor, never again. Goodbye.' Xanxia's finger tightened on the trigger.

Kimus stepped through the main entranceway and - sizing up the situation in a moment - fired his energy weapon at the woman about to kill the Doctor.

Xanxia blinked from white to black and back, positive to negative, then simply disappeared.

'No one else must come in, no one else!' commanded the Doctor, after a breath of relief.

'Are they all dead?' asked Mula.

'Well the Captain certainly is,' replied the Time Lord, 'But Xanxia's another matter.

You'd all better get out of here, this place is pretty unstable. Get down to the base of the mountain.'

'What about you?' queried Kimus.

'It's all right, I'll follow on later. Off you go.'

The young man ushered Mula and the Mentiads away while Romana approached the Doctor.

'Ah, look, Romana, this might be a bit tricky. I want you to go and find K9, take him back to the TARDIS and wait for me there.'

'What about you?'

'Well, I've got a couple of things to do here first. Please go, go on,' he urged.

'All right,' Romana agreed, and went off in search of K9.

The Doctor approached the Captain's still smoking body gingerly and began to examine the remains of the private console. 'Now, Captain...' he murmured to himself.

Romana found K9 just outside the Bridge waiting for her, and they went back to the TARDIS. As she walked past the dais in the throne room, the young Time Lady did not notice the ancient Queen Xanxia open her eyes on the throne, watching.

After a long period of waiting, Romana was relieved when the Doctor finally strode into the central control room of the TARDIS, even if he was laughing smugly. 'So what did you do on the Bridge?'

'You'll never believe it.'

'Try me.'

'All right, I will. I've switched the Captain's circuits around to create a hyper-spatial shield around the shrunken planets. Then I put his dematerialisation controls into remote mode.'

'So we can operate them from here?'

'Precisely.'

'But I don't see how that helps.'

'No, you wouldn't. You're still thinking by the book, Romana. I first dematerialise the TARDIS, then I make Zanak dematerialise for a moment, then invert a gravity field at the hyper-spatial force field and drop the shrunken planets...'

‘Into the hollow centre of Zanak!’ completed Romana.

‘Exactly!’

‘What then?’

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‘Well, I would have thought that was obvious. They expand in an instant to fill the hollow space and - hey presto!’ said the Doctor, snapping his fingers.

‘But what about Calufrax? How do we get hold of the segment?’

‘Well, naturally, Calufrax is flung off into the vortex and we pick it up afterwards in the TARDIS.’

‘Well, naturally.’ Romana realised she might have to reassess the Doctor, just as she had had to reassess the Captain. ‘That’s quite ingenious.’

‘Quite ingenious? It’s fantastic!’

‘All right, it’s fantastic.’

‘Fantastic,’ agreed the Doctor. He began flicking switches. ‘Right - here we go then.’

A few moments later, Zanak was a whole world again. ‘There.’

‘Congratulations.’

‘Clever, eh?’

‘Fantastic. But Doctor, haven’t you forgotten something?’ asked Romana, not to be outdone.

‘Me?’

‘What about the Bridge and the time dams?’

‘Bridge and time dams - K9?’

His robot companion whirred into life, recalling a phrase from his memory banks.

‘Piece of cake, master. Blow them up.’

‘Oh - isn’t that a bit crude?’ asked Romana, ever the purist.

‘Well - it’s a bit crude, but immensely satisfying,’ replied the Doctor. ‘First we should retrieve Calufrax before something else happens to it.’

Getting out of the Bridge proved far easier than getting into it, despite the devastation caused by Zanak's failed attempt to engulf Earth. Kimus, Mula and the Mentiads found a downwards elevation chamber still functioning, and after that, made good time to the base of the mountain. It was nearly dusk when the group reached a clearing Kimus considered to be a safe distance from the Bridge should it start exploding again.

Mula pointed out the pillar of black smoke rising from the guards' headquarters at the edge of the settlement. 'Seems we're not alone in our little revolution.' A wheezing groaning noise startled her, and a strange blue box appeared near them in the clearing.

The doors opened and the two off-worlders emerged, carrying a small box and running a cable from the box's interior. 'Come on, Romana!' the Doctor called. The pair crouched in the middle of the clearing and the Doctor began attaching the cable to the small box.

Kimus and Mula walked over to the off-worlders, an arm around each other's waist.

'Doctor, when all this is over - will we really be free?' asked Kimus.

'I don't see why not. It's entirely up to you, really. You've got to make this world a better place to live in. You've got plenty of material wealth, but there are other things...'

The Doctor turned to his companion. 'The other lead, Romana.' She handed him the wire.

'...Friendship, cooperation...' he continued, and looked up at the happy couple. 'Love.'

'I'll do it,' Romana volunteered. She set about attaching the wire to the box.

'Thank you.' The Doctor stood and draped an arm over Kimus and Mula's shoulders.

'Now - I think this is a good place in the universe to settle down. There's a reasonable sun, good neighbours, and some quite convenient stars for when you get around to conventional space travel. I think you're going to be all right here,' he finished with a smile.

His companion finished the connection and pulled a handle up out of the detonator box. 'Ready, Doctor.'

'Good.' He went to Pralix and the other Mentiads. 'Next, what I want to know is - am 83

I going to blow up the Bridge or will you?'

'We will,' replied the Mentiads in unison.

The Doctor nodded approvingly. 'I'll get out of the way while you concentrate.'

They all stared intently at the box, and after a moment the handle plunged downwards.

High in the mountain, the three structures that were the Captain's stronghold blew apart in a series of ear-shattering explosions and blinding light. When all the noise and light had diminished to tolerable levels, the Doctor looked to his companion.

'That was very satisfying. Come on, Romana, we've got a job to do. Bye, bye, everybody!' With a cheery wave, the Time Lords disappeared into the upright blue box that disappeared after more wheezing and groaning.

Kimus turned to Mula. 'You know, all this is going to take some explaining. No more golden ages of prosperity.'

'No more wealth beyond the dreams of avarice,' she nodded in agreement.

'But a life, truly free and happy, without fear of execution or exile,' added Pralix.

The group began the long trek back to the settlement. They had a society, a whole world to rebuild.

Epilogue

Romana was standing at a bench in the TARDIS storage room, with the two segments of the Key to Time in front of her. Where were the other four pieces hidden, she wondered, and what would be the cost of recovering them?

The Doctor bustled into the room and strode straight up to the bench. 'Right! Let's put these two together and go and find the third.' He picked up one of the segments and made several bumbling attempts to fit it with the other. 'Oh! Err - I see...'

'Here, let me do it,' said his impatient assistant, and took the segments.

'What?'

Romana correctly meshed the segments together in moments. 'I used to be rather good at puzzles.'

'Puzzles?' said the aggrieved Doctor. 'You wouldn't call that a puzzle, would you?'

'No, hardly complex enough to be called a puzzle, is it?' she replied superciliously.

'Certainly isn't,' mumbled the humbled Doctor.

'Look - shouldn't we be getting on? We've only got two segments. Why don't you go and find out where our next destination is.'

'Right!' The Doctor was nearly out of the storeroom when he realised that he was following her suggestions instead of making his own. He paused. 'Romana - I've just decided to go and find out where our next destination is.' He walked to the console and activated the Tracer - a set of coordinates flashed across a display screen.

'Well?' called out Romana, from the storage room, where she was putting the segments back into the old fridge that wasn't a fridge.

The Doctor began to beam from ear to ear. 'Have I got a treat in store for you, Romana.'

'Really?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Better than Calufrax, I hope.'

'Oh, much better than Calufrax. You'll love it. I promise you, you'll love it!' The Doctor had good cause to smile - they were headed for one of his favourite planets, which they had actually just saved from destruction - Earth!

The Doctor and Romana head for Calufrax in search of the second segment of the all-powerful Key to Time. But something blocks their attempts to materialise on the barren, ice-covered planet. When the TARDIS does materialise it is not on Calufrax but on the affluent world of Zanak, controlled by the Captain's harsh regime.

What is the secret behind Zanak's bountiful mines and its unseen leader? Who is really pulling the strings among the planet's rulers? What happened to Calufrax, and where is the second segment?

The Doctor, Romana and K9 must battle the ghost of a tyrant ruler from the past and stop Earth becoming the next victim of Zanak – the Pirate Planet!

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